



## WOW: Word Of the Week

Love

April 5, 2023

Does the church have a “love” problem? One of the marks of being a disciple of Jesus is love.

“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35, ESV). In many Christian groups, love is the #1 evidence of discipleship, the thing most often mentioned: “love one another.” In the church, we often hear that following Jesus is about loving one another.

Have you considered that the verse is often quoted without context? The verse does not appear in isolation. What is the context? Study, think. After the Triumphal Entry, the week has passed rapidly with encounters and arguments with Jewish leaders. Jesus is now with his disciples in an Upper Room. He has given them an example by washing their feet. He has predicted the betrayal. He will predict Peter’s denial. Jesus prefaces John 13:35 by saying that he is giving a new commandment. Many Christians have read Jesus’ words and wondered what is new about “love one another.” A few months ago, I focused on two different Greek words that are translated new – *neos* means new in point of time; *kainos* means new in quality, not previously used, a replacement. The new *kainos* covenant replaced the old covenant. Jesus’ new *kainos* command replaces an old command. What is the old command? What does Jesus add that is new? A recent post by Roberto Bottrel reminded me of the often-unseen contrast Jesus makes.

Pay attention. Could it be that the old command is what Jesus said a couple of days earlier? “Love your neighbor as yourself.” A Jewish lawyer had approached Jesus to test him. What if Jesus’ response to the question posed by a lawyer is the old command? Jesus referred to the Old Testament passage in Lev. 19:18. Certainly, that qualifies as an old command.

What is the contrast? The old command and the new command are not the same. The old command was to love as we love ourselves. The new command is to love as Jesus loves us. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another” (John 13:34). Loving as we love ourselves is relatively easy. Loving as Jesus loved is extremely difficult.

The love that marks disciples of Jesus is uncommon. The hurdle height is raised. Clearing the hurdles in the Christian race is demanding. We can never be satisfied to love one another as we love ourselves. “Let’s just all love another and get along – one big happy family!” The new command is not so simple. We are called to love as Jesus loved. Jesus loved sacrificially. Jesus came to serve and give his life for others.

When John uses similar wording in 1 John 2:7-8, contrasting an old command and a new command, he points to the same new standard. “This is how we recognize genuine love. Jesus laid down his life for us, so we ought to lay down our lives for one another” (1 John 3:16 paraphrased). (Why do we not know 1 John 3:16 as well as we know John 3:16?)

In John 15, Jesus says that bearing fruit is a mark of the true disciple (John 15:4). In the same context, he again quotes the command, “Love each other as I have loved you, laying down your life...” (John 15:12-14).

Do not rob John 13:35 of its power, its truth, its beauty! Do not understand some impotent, easy kind of mutual love as fulfilling Jesus’ teaching. The second greatest command of the Old Testament is now updated, replaced. The old gives way to the new. For Christians committed to faithful discipleship, loving others as we love ourselves will never be enough. Lord, help me learn to love my Christian family as Jesus has loved me. Help me clear that hurdle so I can move to the next, even higher, hurdle. Lord, help me learn to love others as Jesus has loved me.