

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: January 18, 2015

The New Commandment

by Dan Trygg

“Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, in order that you might love one another, according as I loved you, in order that also you might love one another.³⁵ By this all people will experientially-know that you are My disciples, if ever you might have love for one another.³⁶ Simon Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, where are You going?’ Jesus answered, ‘Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later.’³⁷ Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You!’^{14:1} ... ‘Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me.’”
John 13:33-37; 14:1

When we read the scriptures, we all have preconceived ideas or expectations that strongly influence our interpretation of what we are reading. Moreover, our teachers, and *even the translators of our Bibles, also have their own theological positions and perceptions that “color” how they understand and render the text.* Usually these translational renderings are only minor, and do not profoundly affect the meaning. Sometimes, however, the bias, or interpretive filter, that the translators have prevented them from seeing an important insight. **If the translators do not adequately bring this language over into our English, the problem is compounded. Then, we miss what Jesus is trying to say, because it is not clearly expressed in our translations.** I believe this has happened to this passage. **I believe there is a “nugget” hidden here, which most people skim right over.** I think it represents the difference between a traditional religious understanding of life, versus a revolutionary, “new covenant” approach.

We typically think that Jesus is *equating* the “new commandment” with “love one another”, meaning **that to love one another is the new commandment.** Although that is what it appears to say in the English, *the Greek is actually saying something very different.* **It is a classic purpose clause in Greek: “A new commandment I am giving to you in order that you might love one another.”** If you take this language at face value, it seems to be saying that Jesus is giving them a new commandment that *will enable them to love one another.* **The new commandment does not equal “love one another”. Rather, whatever this new commandment is, its intended purpose is to bring about this unique *agapē-love* for one another.** *That* is the setup, the way most Greek scholars would initially look at this structure.

The obvious question is, “Ok. What is this new commandment, then?” Unfortunately, because of *questions, and the banter between Jesus and His disciples, it takes several verses for Jesus to complete the thought He introduced in verse 34.* The next imperative, or command, does not occur until the first verse of the *next* chapter. **Not surprisingly, Peter is the first to break in with his questions. Just like his interruption in Matthew 16:21-23, he is thinking more about his interests, than the things of God.** In spite of his enthusiasm and devotion, he is *not* helping here! He is actually *distracting* from the point. **Jesus had to abruptly put him in his place,** “Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times!” When you look further in the context, you will see that **Jesus had to respond to three other disciples, as well** (Thomas, Philip, and Judas Thaddeus). These interruptions may make following Jesus’ argument more difficult, but it clearly indicates that John had been there, and he was faithfully reporting the interchange of that evening. **It was probably indicative of the actual dynamics of this first inter-active group of Jesus’ disciples. We shouldn’t be surprised at the “bunny trails” and divergent topics that surface in our small groups. Jesus had to deal with this, too.** He had to “reel them back in” repeatedly, to get back to the main point.

So, what was this mysterious “new commandment”? “Believe in God and believe also in Me.” This may seem like a strange thing to say, since we have heard it all our lives, but for the disciples this was an important message to convey. **It does not seem that the disciples really fully understood the centrality of Jesus.** They certainly thought of Him as the Messiah, sent from God. They probably thought of Him as a prophet. They believed His message, and what He taught. They were committed and loyal to Him as their Teacher. **Did they really think of Him as God, as the object of their faith?** That would have been a mind-bending concept for monotheistic Jews.

It is interesting to do a survey of the verb “believe” (Gk., *pisteuō*). Matthew’s gospel only has this verb nine times. Mark, ten times. Luke, nine times. By contrast, John uses this word ninety-eight times! The book of Acts, the record of the church after Jesus resurrection, uses this word thirty-six times. Paul uses it some twenty-one times in Romans, alone. The usage falls off to a mere sprinkling again, through most of the other epistles (probably because these are written to people who *already* believe). Then, John employs this word nine times in his first epistle. **When you look more closely at the use of this word in the first three gospels, there is virtually no call to believe on Jesus to be**

saved, at all! He is not presented as the object of faith. He is the proclaimer of the good news of God's coming Kingdom, and He demonstrated the works of the Kingdom. He was the promised son of David, the ruler of this Kingdom. He recruited followers to a future Kingdom, when He will return with His angels on the clouds in glory to judge the world, to remove the wicked and to reign over the earth. These descriptions are more than human, but do they indicate He is God, or to be worshipped as God? No. **Jesus talks of His coming suffering and death, but He does not explain why He is going to die, in the first three gospels.** Only at the last supper, does He speak of His body as being "given for them", and His blood as being "the new covenant poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Lk. 22:19,20; Matt. 26:28). In the last few verses of Luke's gospel, the resurrected Jesus explains, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations" (Luke 24:46-47). **The first three gospels focus on telling the story of what happened, leaving the explanation of its significance to others.**

By contrast, **John's gospel emphasizes faith in Christ as the key to receiving life from God that saves, and transforms the soul.** This message is repeated throughout the book (1:12,13; 3:14-18,36; 6:35,40,47; 7:38,39; 8:24; 11:25,26; 12:35,36; 14:10-12; 16:27; 20:30,31). Furthermore, John's introductory description of Jesus as the eternal Word, who was "with God" and "was God", and the three-fold lines of argument he uses (Jesus' claims [6:35; 8:12; 10:7,11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1]; His use of the Divine name [4:26; 6:20; 8:24,28,58; 13:19; 18:4-6]; and the miraculous "signs" He performed), establish that **Jesus was more than a man, ...He was God in the flesh!** It is entirely appropriate to honor Him as God, ...in fact, the Father has *insisted* upon it (5:18-23). Not only was God working in His life, **Jesus said that to know Him was to experience the Father**, because "the Father abiding in Me does His works" (14:10). Imagine, having the God of the universe living inside of you! Well, **Jesus says it is possible for the ones who believe in Him to experience the same kind of God-empowered life He did**, even to do the miraculous works He Himself performed, ...and even *more* (14:12). **Jesus tells us that we can ask Him to do things for us, and He will**, provided they are according to His name and character (14:13,14). Jesus was going to go to the Father, and He would send the Holy Spirit to live inside each of us (7:38,39; 14:16-18; cf. Acts 2:38,39). Because of this, **we will experientially know that Jesus is in the Father, and we in Jesus, and He in us** (14:20).

How does all this relate to loving one another? Jesus came to establish the new covenant. The difference between the old and new covenants was that ***the old covenant was external***. It was a list of laws and commandments written on stone tablets. Those who tried living by it were unable to keep it, because their hearts were still selfish and darkened by sin (Deut. 29:4). ***The new covenant was internal***. It would be "written on the heart and upon the mind" (Jer. 31:31-34). The hearts of people would be changed, so that they could, ...and, in fact, *would...*, keep God's directives (Ezk. 11:19,20; 36:25-27). **This new covenant was purchased and established by Christ, through His death on the cross** (Heb. 8:6-13; 9:11-28; II Cor. 5,6). *It is the inheritance of all those who believe in Him.* Peter declared that **the promise of the Spirit is for all of us who trust in Christ** (Acts 2:38,39; Gal. 4:6). Paul tells us that, having been justified, we have peace with God through Jesus, and "the agapē-love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 5:5). This agrees with I John 4:7-9, "Beloved, let us love one another, for **agapē-love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.** The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only Son into the world so that we might live through Him." In other words, the agapē-love comes from God, through the life-giving Holy Spirit. **Only those who are born of God and experientially-know Him are able to love in this way.**

Jesus had said, "A new commandment I am giving to you, in order that you might love one another." He later said, "If ever you might love Me, you *will* keep My commandments." **He wasn't saying that we will prove our love by our obedience. Rather, He was saying that our obedience will come from the agapē-love.** This statement also agrees with a passage from I John 2, "By this **we experientially-know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.** The one who *says*, 'I have come to know Him,' and yet does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but **whoever keeps His word, in him the agapē-love of God has truly been perfected.** By this we know that we are in Him: the one who *says* he abides in Him *ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked*" (vss. 3-6). **Note the progression: a genuine, authentic knowledge of God brings agapē-love into a person's heart. The agapē-love produces obedience, a keeping of His word and a walk that looks like Jesus' walk.** Or, to trace it backwards, like John does here: The Jesus-walk, the walk of obedience, is the fulfillment or mature-outworking of agapē-love; and the love is the out-working of a life that has been born of God and experientially-knows God. **And how are you born of God? "As many as receive Him, to them He gave the authority to become children of God, ...even to those who believe in His name"** (Jn. 1:12). How do you come to maturity? How do you walk in the Spirit? "As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him" (Col. 2:6). **We received Him by faith, now we must walk in faith. Faith diligently seeks, watchfully waits, obediently responds.**