



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 13: 31-38

John

"The Eleventh Commandment"

TRANSCRIPT

Our text this morning is John chapter 13. We're going to finish up the chapter with verses 31 through 38. The Lord has been meeting with His twelve disciples in the upper room. One of them has left. Judas has been dismissed. He has gone out into the night, as John put it, in verse 30. And now we read in verse 31:

Therefore when he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him; if God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and will glorify Him immediately. 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.' A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

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." Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You." Jesus answered, "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."

May the Lord bless this reading of His word and our time of study in it together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, it is a great privilege to be here, together with the saints, to gather with men and women who have put their faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior.

What a privilege it is to open the Scriptures, and read them, and then spend time in some detailed study of this passage, and learn this great commandment that our Lord gave us. Father, it is a great commandment. It is such an all-encompassing commandment, this command to love one another, and I pray, Lord, that You would bless us in our study of it. To understand the text, to understand the meaning of our Lord's words, to understand all that was unfolding in that hour, and what would take place in the hours to come as He gave His life ransom for us. Help us to understand this new commandment that He gave.

And yet Lord, as we pray that, we must confess that understanding the commandment is not nearly so difficult as actually living it. Help us to do that. Help us to see the greatness of His work for us, the grace of God and the cross and the salvation that it brought, and all that we have as a result of Your Son pouring out His life blood for us. And through the understanding of that, move us to live lives that please You and live lives of obedient service, obedience and love for one another. In that way, the world will see Your grace enacted before it.

Well, we look to You to do that, Father. We are so thankful that You have well-equipped us to do that very thing. You have placed within the hearts of every man, woman, and child who has put his or her faith in Jesus Christ, the third person of the Trinity. What a mystery, what a blessing that is to know that the Holy Spirit dwells within us. He's sealed our hearts. He protects us. He guides us. He teaches us. He leads us through this world. And so as He ministers to us, he not only opens up our minds to understand Your truth; He moves our wills to obey it. We're well-equipped. Thank You for that, Father. Thank You that we can live in obedience. By the power of the Spirit. Help us to do that, to walk by the Spirit. We pray that for our time this hour, that we would learn, that we would act on what we have learned, and that You would bless us and make us a blessing to others as a result of that.

Bless us spiritually, Father, in this hour, and bless us materially, physically as well. We have those needs. There are sick people who have asked us to pray for them, and we pray that You'd bless. Give healing, give encouragement. Difficulties in life can beat us down and drag us down not only physically; but with the physical difficulties come the emotional, and the spiritual struggles. We pray that You'd give encouragement for those of us who received such blessing from You, such wonderful things from Your hand, in the material realm, in the ways of physical health and

financial security. All of that, Lord. May we not grow slack. May we not drift. May we not think that we're on solid ground, because we have money in the bank. May we realize that all of that can be taken away in a moment. Health can evaporate. Our bank accounts can evaporate. All can go away. But You will not, and may we, in the midst of prosperity, be particularly grateful and thankful and draw close to the throne of grace to find help in time of need. May we be appreciative of what we have.

We thank You, Lord, that when those difficulties do occur, they're for our good. They're not to destroy us, but to bring us to You and to strengthen us and bless us in ways that the things of this world can never, never even begin to do. Thank You for Your goodness to us, Father. Bless us in this hour. Bless us this evening when we return to remember our Lord. What a privilege that is, to gather around His table, to take the elements, to remember that He died in our place, and remember that that's a temporary memorial, and it will be replaced by the real thing when Your Son returns. He's coming. That's our hope, and our hope is that He's coming very soon. May that day come soon, Father. And may, in the meantime, we live for it, live obedient lives, and live according to the ethic we have set forth in this text. May we be men and women who love one another. We pray that in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] My wife has a beautiful piece of jewelry that a friend brought her from France. It's a Huguenot cross, which she wears around her neck. It has an unusual shape. A teardrop hangs from it as a remembrance of the severe persecutions that the Huguenots, who were the French protestants, suffered during the Reformation. It's an unusual cross, but wearing crosses isn't all that unusual. Many people wear them in all kinds of shapes made of all kinds of materials, and since the cross of Christ is at the heart of the Christian faith. In fact, the central event of history, it's understandable, I suppose, that it would become the identifiable symbol of Christianity, at least for many people. But Jesus didn't say, "By this, all men will know that you are My disciples," if you wear a cross. And it's a good thing He didn't say that because so many people today are wearing crosses as a fashion statement.

No, the Lord has given something intangible as the distinguishing mark of His disciples, and He gives that in our text this morning in John chapter 13 and verse 35 when He says, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." That's the subject of our text, what Christ calls the "New

Commandment." It is a subject that He takes up only now because until now, He wasn't free to speak about true discipleship. A stranger had been present with them in the room. Maybe you've been in a situation like that where you've gathered with a group of friends but you really couldn't speak freely because there was someone else present who was of a different spirit, who wasn't sympathetic with your views or your ideas. When he leaves, the atmosphere changes completely. The group lightens up. Everyone can speak his or her mind and the conversation begins to flow very freely.

That happened in the upper room. The change of atmospheres indicated in the opening words of verse 31, when, "Therefore he had gone out." When that happened, that is, when Judas had gone out into the night, then a barrier came down. The Lord now speaks His mind to His true disciples, those for whom the message was intended, the message of all these discourses that follow in those last hours of His life. He speaks to them very freely. These verses that we look at this morning, these remaining verses of chapter 13 have been called the prologue to the Upper Room Discourse, something of an introduction to what follows. Because here, the Lord will give personal instruction that has very personal meaning for each and every one of these men before He departs from them. We could summarize the following contents in chapters 14 through 16 very simply as this: He will, in chapter 14, prepare them for His sudden removal.

They're not expecting that. This will come as a surprise, so He must prepare them for that. He does so in chapter 14. And then in chapter 15, He will explain to them the new relationships which He will have with them. And then in chapter 16, the way that relationship will be maintained as He is gone from them. Now, that puts it very simply, and He will say much more than that. But He introduces all of that here in these last verses in chapter 13. And here, He develops two main subjects: His glorification, and a new commandment. Now, the importance of that first subject, the importance of His glorification is seen in the fact that the Lord uses the word "glorify" five times in verses 31 and 32. We also see the importance of it in the fact that He comes to this subject first of all. This is the one He takes up. "Now is the Son of Man glorified." That is, now that Judas has left on his errand of betrayal, the wheels have begun to be set in motion for the Lord's arrest, His crucifixion, and His subsequent vindication in the resurrection. That is about to happen, and that is certain, and He underscores that, that these things will take place, and what will take place is

glorification that He will triumph in what will take place, and it will be certain, and He expresses that in the fact that He puts a future event in the past tense.

In the Greek text, the word "glorify" is in the aorist tense. It's a simple past tense. So it doesn't say. The Son of Man will be glorified, but is glorified. Jesus was so certain of the victory that would come, of the glorification that would occur that He speaks of it as though it had already happened. Now here, glorification principally refers to His death. We've seen that before in the Gospel of John. We've seen it throughout the Gospel of John. He refers to it in that way, but He spoke in that way not long ago in chapter 12 when the Greeks came to Him. When He heard that the Greeks were seeking an audience with Him, He didn't begin to speak about the time in which He might meet with them. His first response, His only response to that that we read of was when He said: the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. He knew that His death was imminent by that fact that the Greeks had come.

So He speaks of His death in what we might think are rather unusual terms, as being glorified. Now, there are glorious ways to die. At least we can imagine glorious ways to die, such as a soldier falling in battle, dying a hero's death, sometimes even death is romanticized. Tennyson did that with the Charge of the Light Brigade. But anyone who saw Christ die would not have believed that there was glory or anything romantic about it. To them, He died as a criminal among criminals. Not as a conqueror. They saw a man nailed to a cross, naked and helpless. And yet, the Lord is very clear as are the apostles throughout the New Testament that the cross is where the Son was glorified. And also, the Father, because the Lord adds, "And God is glorified in Him." God was glorified both in His wisdom and His power. Because the cross meets our needs completely, and it satisfies God's character completely. It reveals the wisdom of God because it solves the riddle of how a holy God can forgive unholy people, how He can be, as Paul puts it in Romans chapter 3 and verse 26, both just and the justifier of the one who believes in Jesus Christ.

The answer to that is found in Jesus Christ, as the substitute who would bear our sin and pay our penalty in our place. So, in His death, in our place. In His death, as our substitute, we see the wisdom of God in such a costly plan of salvation. We see God's justice perfectly met and satisfied without compromise at all.

Now, the world has a hard time understanding that. Why can't God just forgive the way we forgive? Because God's not like us. When we forgive another

who has sinned against us, we forgive as one sinner to another. We can't do anything to remove that person's sin, but we let it go because we know, well, we're no different than they are. We're just as guilty as they are. Who are we to withhold forgiveness from one who has sinned against us, who have sinned so much ourselves? The case is very much different with God because He is a holy God. He is sinless. He is just. Absolutely just.

So He cannot let sin go unaddressed. He can't merely absolve us of guilt, because the guilt remains. It does not simply go away. It must be removed, and it must be removed justly. So that was a problem, the dilemma, we could put it perhaps, that faced the Godhead, if we want to speak of it in human terms. How can God forgive sinners and remain just? Or, how can He justly punish sin without destroying the sinner?

The answer to that is found in the cross of Jesus Christ, the substitute who came, and who bore the sin in our place, who was punished in our place, and in so doing satisfied God's justice completely, and in so doing saved us from the penalty of that sin. We see His justice. The wisdom of God in that justice at the cross, and we see His love there because He's paid such a price, such a great price for us, such a great price for damaged goods. That's what we are. In and of ourselves, that's what we are. We are sinners. In fact, that's how Paul describes the greatness of God's love. He says in Romans 5:8, God demonstrated His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

So we see the great love of God in the cross, His display there, and we see His power in the cross because that is where Christ saved us. I have made this point before. I'll make it again. I think it's worth making time and time again: the cross is where salvation occurred. The cross was not some great provision of salvation that is laid out there for people to take if they so choose, or to leave if they choose. That is where your salvation, if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, was finished. It was completed. The issue was settled. Sin was paid for, and you were redeemed at the cross. In time, the Spirit of God applies the blessings to those for whom Christ died, but there it was, settled at the cross. He obtained us for Himself there. He defeated our enemies. He delivered us from them, from their possession. The cross of Christ was no defeat. It was a victory. When Rome was crushing Christ on the cross, Christ was crushing the head of the serpent. He was defeating Satan in fulfillment of

Genesis 3:15. By dying as our substitute, He delivered us from the penalty of the broken law. He paid all our debts on the cross, saved us from spiritual bankruptcy.

And that is exactly what the sinner is. The sinner is bankrupt. Swiss theologian Emil Brunner was neo-orthodox, but he had many good things to say, and he put this very well when he wrote that the moralist considers his behavior and considers himself justified before God. He considers that by his works, by his good efforts, by his good life, he can make his way back to God. He's quite self-confident in himself and in what he does. But the sinner, as Brunner pointed out, knows that he is a guilty being and that he has nothing with which he may pay his debts. The sinner understands who he is and what he is, and he knows that only Christ can do that. Only Christ can pay the debts and do what Brunner called, in his accomplished death, a real transaction.

Now, that's what the death of Christ is. That's one way to speak of our Lord's death. We speak of it chiefly as an atonement. It is that which satisfied completely the justice of God. But it satisfied it by paying for our sins, and it was a real transaction which He paid for our sins and did what we could not do for ourselves. Brunner also speaks of the sinner as one who understands his condition. He is one who sees this vast separation between him and God and knows that he cannot, cannot bridge the chasm. It's as though he's like one who walks up to a great chasm, and he comes to the end of himself. He sees that there is this deep void between him and God, and he comes to the end of himself and he says he despairs. Despairs of saving himself, of coming to God.

Now, as he points out, that despair doesn't save him. Despair does nothing more than cause despair. But the person who comes to that point then, by the grace of God, sees while he cannot go to God, God comes to him, comes to him in the mediator, the one who bridges the gulf, the Lord Jesus Christ. He puts his faith in Him, trust in Him. That's what the Lord has done. That's what Christ has done. That's the cross. He has bridged the gulf between us and God. He has brought us into a saving relationship. It's His work, and His work alone. He paid our debts. He lifted us up from bankruptcy. He drew us up out of that pit. He put us on solid ground. He caused us to be justified with God. And in that way, He overthrew our enemies.

John Stott put it this way: "By liberating us from these," that means liberating us from our sins, "He liberated us from them." The devil and his demons. Satan

cannot hold us in his power now that we are clean, now that our sins have been punished, now that our guilt has been removed. God has declared the believer innocent in Jesus Christ, and Satan cannot hold Him, cannot touch Him. He has no power over Him. He can sling his fiery darts at us but he cannot reclaim us and make us his own. In fact, in Colossians chapter 2 and verse 15, Paul described the Lord's victory as disarming the demonic powers and dragging them behind His chariot in a triumphal parade.

That was good news, indeed, to Paul's first century readers who lived in great fear of the spiritual powers of the world. There are parts of the world in this day in which we live that still have that idea of the world around us. They are people who are slaves of superstition and fear. I watched a program a couple of weeks ago. Just happened to come across it. I think it was PBS, about three different journeys in the world people made. One of them was in Nepal, and a young Nepalese man, who was a Buddhist, made a little journey up through the Himalayas to a Buddhist monastery. The thing that caught my attention was, as this little party moved along these narrow mountain roads, the Sherpas, the guides, guarded every step, were fearful at every step, all along that path, across every little bridge they crossed over the deep chasms in that region, of the demons, of the evil powers, the evil spirits. They carried charms with them, and they would carry out magical incantations and different things like piling up rocks and tossing dirt on it to keep the demons away. Every step, they were fearful of the evil spirits. They lived in a slavery to the fear and the darkness that they live in because Satan has power of fear. He keeps the unbeliever in ignorance and subject to the superstitions of the day. And I thought, what a message the gospel has for those people. That Christ has defeated all of our enemies. He's delivered us from all of that. As Paul wrote, the Lord disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public display of them having triumphed over them.

That happened at the cross, and that is glorious. It didn't appear glorious to the people that looked at it. What appeared to be a defeat though, was a victory. What seemed to be the height of feebleness and folly was the greatest manifestation of wisdom and power. And so Christ says, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in Him." But also there's future glory beyond the cross, and the Lord speaks of that in verse 32. "If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and will glorify Him immediately."

This concluding aspect of glorification, what we're speaking of here, occurred in the resurrection and ascension of the Lord, when He overcame the grave, when He defeated the grave, and was brought up from it. Not only up from the grave, but ascended into heaven where He is seated in glory at the right hand of the father. The Lord saves us because He died for us, but He could not save us unless He was a living Savior. And so His resurrection was necessary for His glory to be completed. And all of this would happen soon. It would happen immediately, the Lord said. He would be glorified, He would be crucified and resurrected in a matter of hours.

But the disciples did not comprehend any of this. These are glorious things that the Lord is saying. This is a magnificent truth. But the Lord has really, up until this point, spoken of the cross, spoken of the resurrection in rather veiled terms, spoken of it as glory. They're not comprehending that. And so now in verses 33 following, he speaks more directly and speaks with great affection. Knowing that His earthly relationship with the disciples would soon end, He calls them little children. This is the only place in the gospels where the word occurs. John uses it seven times in his epistle of 1 John, so he was obviously influenced by the Lord's use of it. But the Lord used this expression only now after Judas has gone from the room because this expression reflects a genuine spiritual relationship with Him. They are children of His because they are products of the new birth. 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.'"

It's about six months earlier from this, during the Feast of Tabernacles that the Lord had made that statement to the Jews. Back in chapter 7, he told them, "You shall seek Me and shall not find Me." He doesn't tell the disciples, "You shall not find Me." He says, "You will seek Me." They will long for Him. They will long for His companionship. They would not be able to come with Him, come where he was going. Maybe they could not join Him in heaven at that time. Later, though, they would. They would find Him. They would be with Him. In chapter 14, He tells them that they will join Him, that He was going to His Father's house to prepare a place for them. It would be a new situation for them, though, what would follow. Things that would take place, the situation that would follow in the very short time would be a very new situation from what they had experienced. He would be absent from them. He would be absent from the world, physically. The world would not see

Him. But, they would be His representatives. They would be His ambassadors. And the world would see Him in them. And so, this would be a new situation, a very important situation. And so, for this new situation, He gives new instruction. He gives a new commandment: that you love one another even as I have loved you, that you love one another.

He puts great emphasis upon that. He repeats it twice. Love is the great ethic of the New Covenant and the New Testament, and one of the great themes of the fourth gospel. The Gospel of John is sometimes called the Gospel of God's Love. But it is a virtue that was of great importance in the Old Testament as well. We read through the Old Testament, you find commands to love. You read Leviticus chapter 19 verse 18, there we have the command: you shall love your neighbor as yourself. The rabbi spoke of love. One of the great rabbis of a generation before our Lord, Rabbi Hillel spoke about loving others.

And so we might ask how the Lord's commandment to love is a new commandment. The answer to that is: it's not new in its content to love, but it is new in other ways. It's new in terms of its standard. In the Old Testament, the standard for love was self. You shall love as you love yourself. Now, that's a high standard. It's difficult to love others the way we love ourselves. But here, the new commandment is not that standard. It's even higher. It's to love as Christ loves. "As I have loved you," He said. He is our model, and His love is perfect. It's unconditional, and it is a constant love. Christ never stops loving. His love does not diminish at all. Ours does. We fail constantly, and we fail one another, or you fail me, or I fail you. Our love has diminished a bit, but it's not the case with our Lord. It's constant. It never ends, and that's what He is commanding here. The command is given in the present tense. Keep on loving, is the sense of it. Never stop. Love like Christ loved.

Someone has said the new command is simple enough for a toddler to memorize and appreciate, profound enough that the most mature believers are repeatedly embarrassed at how poorly they comprehend it and put it into practice. The more we understand the nature of this love, the more we recognize how true that statement is. Christ's love is a sacrificial love. He has just exemplified that. He has just illustrated that in washing the feet of His disciples. He stripped Himself, clothed Himself as a slave, bent down, and washed their dirty feet. He humbled Himself to

serve them, and would humble Himself to serve them unto death itself. That's the nature of the love that we are to have for one another, a love that dies to self and lives for others.

But love now also has a new object. In the Old Testament, the object was one's neighbor. That was understood to mean one's fellow Israelite. So, they were to love other Jews. That's how they understood it, which wasn't easy. But at least they could interpret the command narrowly enough where they felt no obligation to the Gentiles around them. But this new commandment has a new object, a much broader object, "one another." And in the church, one another is not one's physical neighbor, but one's spiritual neighbor. And in the world that the Lord entered, preaching this new command, that was a very high standard. Because the New Covenant community, the church became a new people made up of Jews and Gentiles. If we can divide the world very simply into two groups, it would divide in that way: the Gentile and the Jew, and these two groups were natural enemies. The Jews looked down on Gentiles as ritually unclean, outside of the covenants, which they were. They called them dogs. They wouldn't have anything to do with them. They wouldn't eat with them, they wouldn't integrate into Gentile society.

That greatly offended the Gentiles. Both Greek and Roman writers called the Jews "haters of mankind." They were offended by the right of circumcision. They thought that was barbaric. They thought their dietary laws were foolish. They despised the Jew, and the Jew despised the gentile. There was strong hostility between both group. And yet, in Christ, and in the church, these two groups have been brought together and made one. One new man, one new people. They were to love one another in that relationship, and love one another as Christ loved them. Jews accepting Gentiles as equals, Greeks loving Jews, slaves loving masters.

In Christ, the deep divisions that were so numerous were to close. By the grace of God, they were closed. Alexander Maclaren, great preacher in the last part of the last century, in fact, end of the early part of this century wrote, "Barbarian, Scythian, bond, and free, male and female, Jew and Greek, learned and ignorant, clasped hands and sat down at one table and felt themselves all one in Christ Jesus." Now, that's the challenge that faces us. That's the challenge of the new commandment, to be caring for one another as Christ cares for us; forgiving of one another as Christ has forgiven us. It's a high standard, one that we often don't meet,

one that I certainly don't meet. I readily confess that, one that we see not being met throughout the church of Jesus Christ because so often Christians become jealous. They become angry with one another. Divisions occur. It's a problem in the first century church. In fact, the more we understand the standard that the Lord has given to us, the more we understand how far short we fall. The more we recognize our own sinfulness as we measure ourselves against that great standard of love. But in that, the more we begin to appreciate God's love for us. It wasn't love for the good, for the charming, for the pleasant, for the trouble-free. Those are the kind of people that are easy to love., It's the kind of people we do love. Now, His love was for sinners, which is what we are.

By God's grace, we can and we do begin to fulfill this new commandment because love is a fruit of the Spirit. It's a supernatural work that the Spirit of God does within us. And as we walk by the Spirit, Paul tells us we will not carry out the desires of the flesh. These things will become evident within our lives. Love binds us together. It's our standard, what we're to strive for, and by God's grace, we will meet it. This is the great commandment of the church. It's the mark of the Christian.

There's a story that's often told in connection with this passage. It is a story that was preserved by Andrew Bonar and included in his addition of Samuel Rutherford's letters. Rutherford was one of Scotland's greatest theologians, one of the principle authors of the Westminster Confession of Faith in the Shorter Catechism. He was a devoted pastor who wrote letters to those in his congregation, a small congregation, but letters of great devotion. They were bound together in a book and had become, over the centuries, one of the great devotional pieces of literature that Christians have read.

Well, he was a devoted pastor, as I said. And early in his ministry, he was put under arrest because he wouldn't conform to the doctrine and the practice of the Church of England, the Anglican Church. And because it's a state church, the government pursued him, arrested him. The story is told of an event that took place just before that when James Ussher, who was the Anglican archbishop of Ireland passed through the town of Galway where Mr. Rutherford lived. And he stopped at his house on a Saturday evening for a visit. The men had not met, and the archbishop didn't identify himself. In fact, he entered in disguise. Rutherford welcomed him in. He offered him a room for the night. They shared a meal together, and then Mr.

Rutherford invited the archbishop to participate with the rest of the household in the reading of Scripture and the catechism, which was their custom. The whole house came in and gathered around Mr. Rutherford. He read the Scriptures, and then he began to catechize the members of his family.

Then he asked his guest: how many commandments are there? Simple question. And the man replied: "Eleven." Rutherford corrected him. In fact, he was amazed that there was someone in Scotland that did not know that there were only ten commandments. Then the stranger quoted the Lord's words. "A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another." They all appreciated the point. In fact, everyone retired to bed that evening amazed and wondering: who is this stranger?

Early in the morning, Mr. Rutherford went out for a walk and to meditate. It was his practice before he would preach. As he passed by a thicket, he heard a voice praying about the church that would assemble that morning, and Rutherford began to suspect that he had been entertaining an angel unawares when the mystery guest identified himself as Archbishop Ussher. The two had a very good conversation, and that morning in the service, the archbishop was invited to take the pulpit, and he prayed, and he preached in the pulpit of the Presbyterian, the new commandment.

Well, that story may be apocryphal. It may not be quite true, but it makes a good point, and the point is: the 11th commandment closes the divisions that exist between men, whether they be Anglicans and Presbyterians; all who are in Jesus Christ are united in this way, united in the body of Christ, and it's our obligation to observe it, to obey it. Our obligation to Christ, our obligation to one another. But it is also our great privilege because the 11th commandment, or the new commandment is the distinguishing mark of the Christian in this new age. "By this, all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

We live in a watching world. It sees the ways we live as well as hears the things that we believe. And our conduct toward one another is to match the good news of the grace of God. That, the Lord said, will mark us out as His disciples, as His followers. He didn't say that they will know you by premillennialism. They will know you by predestination and election, that they will know you as believers in believer's baptism, or the in the virgin birth, or in the inerrancy of Scripture. Those are all important, and we could list many other doctrines that are very important. I'm not going soft on doctrine, and the Lord wasn't going soft on doctrine. In fact, when

the church does, then it grows weak, and it is unable to cope with the challenges of this world.

In fact, back in chapter 8 and verse 31, the Lord said, "If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of mine." Purity of doctrine and practice are essential. This is not an either-or kind of thing. That is essential that we abide in His word, that we know His truth, that we believe it. But what the Lord says is to set us apart. What the world will see as the distinguishing mark is not a cross. It's not a dove. It's not a fish on your car. It is love for one another.

Now, not love for the world. That's important, too, and that will grow out of our love for one another. We are to love the world, but we are to love one another more. That doesn't diminish love for the world. That exalts love for the brethren. This is for the believer. This is love for the brotherhood. This is love for the people of God, the family of God. And love that's not to be in word only. John will later speak of that in his first epistle. He will speak of love, and he will speak of it as being in deed and truth. Again, that's the challenge. It's what sets us apart from the world, this love for one another, and love is what Dr. Johnson in his notes called the evangelizing virtue.

Donald Grey Barnhouse wrote, visiting a leper colony in Nigeria, Africa where he saw a man who had suffered the ravages of leprosy. He was missing a foot, and then missing his leg up to the knee. He had pads under his knees and he would use sticks to push himself along the ground. One day he escaped from a leper hospital that was run by the government, which was staffed by unsaved men, and he crawled on the ground 30 miles to get to a leper colony that was run by Christians because he knew that there was a difference. The Christians loved one another. Barnhouse writes, "He knew that when a government employee puts his hand on you in a hospital, it isn't the same thing as when a Christian puts his hand upon you. Christians that love one another end up loving the world, but they present a great testimony to the world around them. And that man knew it.

This whole subject of love is most important. The Lord will come back to it again during the evening. And with the importance that He places on it, and the very high standard that He has set, you might think that that would have arrested the attention of the disciples gathered around the table, particularly since, as Luke tells us, they entered the room that night arguing with one another as to who would be the

greatest in the kingdom. Here, the Lord instructs them to love one another. The fact is, it appears to have had absolutely not affect upon them, had made no impression upon them.

The Lord has made two points. First, He will be glorified. He is going away. And secondly, they are to love one another as He has loved them. The Lord has moved from point A to point B, but Peter is still at point A. And he interrupts the Lord in verse 36 with the question: "Lord, where are You going?" The Lord will answer that question, and then Thomas will ask the question in chapter 14 and verse 5, "Lord, we do not know where You are going. How do we know the way?" They haven't gotten to point B yet. They're still amazed that He is leaving. They weren't expecting that.

Now, the Lord will answer that question by Thomas as well, and won't get back onto the subject of love until verse 12 of chapter 15. But what this shows is the Lord was very patient with His disciples.

Peter was understandably preoccupied with the Lord's announcement that He was leaving them. He still had no idea of what lay ahead for Christ, and was proposing to go with Him to give Him company wherever He was going, to support Him wherever He went. And so, the Lord answers Him by saying, "Where I go, you cannot follow Me now." As the Lord will explain to him, His mission in this world was about to come to an end. It was about to be finished, in just a few hours, but Peter's was about to begin. When his ministry was complete, then he would follow. You shall follow later, He says. Peter would follow Him to heaven. That's his meaning. But I think we can also see something further to that, because Peter would also follow Him in the way that He went. Peter would also follow Him in death. His discipleship would be crowned with martyrdom, but he was not ready for that at that time. He was not ready to take up his cross and lay down his life. He would have to fall miserably and be restored and be recommissioned before he would follow fully. He would understand that later.

But at this time, in that evening, he didn't understand. Wherever Jesus went, he wanted to go, and he swears his willingness to die for Christ. Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You." Now, when Peter said that, he meant everything he said. Those were sincere words on Peter's part. He loved the Lord. He wanted to follow Him. He wanted to be with

Him. He was willing to lay down his life. And in fact, you remember in the garden, he pulls out a sword and begins to fight. What he wasn't willing to do, and he didn't realize this: he wasn't willing to lay down his life for what appeared to be a lost cause. And when the time came, he fled. When the time came, he did not lay down his life and stand for the Lord, and the Lord tells him that he would not do that. In fact, he will, when it comes to the crunch, he will deny Him three times. And as we know, he did just that, in spite of the fact that he had been forewarned, in fact given a very clear prophetic warning. He still fell.

There's a warning in that to all of us, and the warning is that you and I are made of the same stuff as Peter was made of. And so the counsel that Paul gave to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 10 applies to us, and it is: let him who thinks he stands take heed, lest he fall. But again, what we see here is the magnificent love of God. We see His patience toward Peter. We see His patience toward all the disciples because He knew that Peter was going to deny Him, and He knew that all the disciples were going to desert Him. And yet, having given this warning, He immediately gives the reassurance in chapter 14. "Let not your hearts be troubled." We will fail. We will fail in this world, but the Lord is our good shepherd, and He brings us back, He restores us, He blesses us because He loves unconditionally, and He loves constantly. He demonstrated that in His death.

And so, in that way, we are to love one another. That is the greatest commandment. That is the commandment that we are to live by: to love one another. The lesson on the new commandment may have gone by the disciples when the Lord taught it the first time, but in time, they did learn it. All the apostles did. In fact, even the one that wasn't there that evening learned it. The apostle Paul, because he wrote in 1 Corinthians 13 that, "If I have all faith so as to remove mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing."

Peter learned the lesson. The Lord restored him with forgiving love. And years later when Peter wrote the book of 1 Peter, he wrote in chapter 4 and verse 8, "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another because love covers a multitude of sins." And the apostle John learned the lesson very well. He's given us a great deal of instruction on love in this gospel. Though we see it in his first epistle as well, because 1 John chapter 3 and verse 11 he wrote, "For this is the message which you

have heard from the beginning that we should love one another." In fact, there's an old tradition that when John was very elderly and had very little strength, he would be brought to meet Christians. And when he would speak with them, he would repeat the great command. It was about all that he could say. Little children love one another.

That is the mark of the Christian. That's the Lord's lesson for us. And evidently, the early church learned that lesson well, because a century after this gospel was published, Tertullian wrote, what the pagans marveled at, how they marveled at the Christians' love for one another, especially as they face fierce persecution, he wrote that they would say, see how these Christians love one another? How ready they are to die for one another? That's the testimony that the church should have today, as well as it had back in those days. We are to be a people who love one another. May that be the testimony of this church. May we each, by God's grace, see our need to live by this new commandment, and show in so doing that we are the Lord's disciples. Now that's not how one becomes a disciple. It is impossible for a person to love without being a disciple. This is what a disciple does, and one becomes a disciple not by loving Christians but by trusting in Christ. One enters into salvation by faith and faith alone in Him.

So if you're here this morning without faith in Jesus Christ, the command to you, the instruction to you is: believe in the Lord Jesus. Realize you cannot work your way to God. You cannot make your way to Him. No moralist can get to God. He's lost. You must understand that. You must despair of gaining any access to God in your own strength and realize God comes to us and trust in Him, and receive freely the gift of life that He gives in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, trust in Him. He's died for sinners so that all who believe in Him might be saved and have everlasting life. And you who have believed, live as Christ has commanded you to live, as He commanded all of us to live, by loving one another. We can do that by God's grace and may God bless us with that. Let's stand now for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for Your goodness to us. Thank You for Your grace, Your mercy. We see it in the cross. We see wisdom and power. We see how You solved the riddle of how to be just and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus Christ. It's by the substitute. It's by his work on our behalf that we see in that

the great standard of conduct for us. Love, as it has been exemplified only in the cross, the great demonstration of Your love. Help us to love like that. Help us to love one another. And in so doing –