

A NEW COMMANDMENT

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Jesus Christ clearly stated the two great commandments from which all the Law is derived: “Master, which commandment *is the* great commandment in the Law? And Jesus said to him, ‘**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.**’ This is *the* first and greatest commandment; And *the* second *one is* like it: ‘**You shall love your neighbor as yourself.**’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:36-40).

There is nothing new about either of these, as the first is quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5 and the second from Leviticus 19:18. In fact, the “Law of Love” existed long before the existence of mankind because God *is* love (1 John 4:8, 16) *and* the Lawgiver, so the “Law of Love” has existed eternally.

However, consider what Jesus said after Judas left the table during the Passover: “A **new commandment** I give to you: that you love one another in the same way that I have loved you, that *is how* you are to love one another. By this shall everyone know that you are My disciples—if you love one another.” (John 13:34-35).

Jesus calls this a *new* commandment—but why is this new? The Law was recorded thousands of years ago; however, notice that Jesus directs the disciples to love *one another* and doesn’t mention their *neighbors*. Why did Jesus single out the relationships of disciples? Were the disciples so hard hearted that they needed to be admonished to love one another? Or was He implying that they were no longer required to love their neighbors?

Jesus said He came to fulfill the *spiritual* understanding of the Law that was recorded by Moses and the Prophets (Matthew 5:17). Was there something missing such that Jesus had to add a *new* commandment? The addition of a new commandment is not only surprising, but it would be important for us to understand. Since the “Law of Love” is fulfilled by keeping God’s commandments (John 14:15), why is there a new commandment?

In fact, Jesus answers that very question. He said, “You have heard that it was said [*in times past*], ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, So that you yourselves may be *the* children of your Father Who *is* in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and on *the* good, and sends rain on *the* just and on *the* unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not the tax collectors practice the same *thing*?

And if you salute your brethren only, what have you done *that is* extraordinary? Do not the tax collectors practice the same *thing*? Therefore, you shall be perfect, even as your Father Who *is* in heaven is perfect.” (Matthew 5:43-48).

Jesus told the disciples they had to go beyond themselves—they were to show love toward *all* mankind, including their enemies. But we are still left with the question: why is it a new commandment? The answer lies in comparing the original commandment to the new commandment given during the Passover.

Look at what Moses recorded: “[You] shall love your neighbor **as yourself**.” (Leviticus 19:18). Now, examine what Jesus said to the disciples: “A new commandment I give to you: that you love one another **in the same way that I have loved you**, that *is how* you are to love one another.” (John 13:34-35).

Do you see the change in focus? The original commandment was based upon love of *self*, whereas the new commandment is based upon the way God loves us. No physical human being can have—or even understand—the *agape* love of God without His spirit. As such, people are limited in *how* they can love others—and God. Only those with God’s spirit are capable of comprehending and showing *agape* love to others and God: “Beloved, we should love one another because **love is from God**; and everyone who loves has been begotten by God, and knows God. **The one who does not love does not know God because God is love.**” (1 John 4:7-8). Only God’s *agape* love can transcend the self. Mankind is incapable of showing love toward others that is not founded in our physical love of our own self. It is just the way God made us. From the beginning, we were incomplete because physical life falls short of the fullness of spiritual life.

Passover was the appointed time for Jesus to make known the fullness of the new commandment that God's people are to love *each other as Jesus Christ loved us!* The new commandment is that we show the true love of God—*agape* love—toward our brothers and sisters in Christ. Interestingly, the Greek word for new does not mean the opposite of old, as in age. It means *unheard of* or *fresh*. This was something the world had never known. The standard for the “Law of Love” was no longer based upon physical, human love but upon the *agape* love of *God!* With this commandment, Jesus Christ completed the work He mentioned in Matthew 5:17: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.”

Jesus greatly desired to eat the Passover with the disciples because His sacrifice was the turning point in God’s relationship with mankind. Finally, mankind would be capable of having the same *agape* love toward God that He has shown toward mankind since the creation.

The original law to love our neighbor *as ourself* is still the commandment for those that are unconverted because impossible for them to have the *agape* love of God in them; however, the begotten children of God have that which transcends human love. Through

God's holy spirit, we not only have a command to show *agape* love to our brethren, but we have a need and desire to do so—just like God. Jesus said “With earnest desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you” (Luke 22:15) because that Passover was the moment that gave mankind the means to truly love God in return. That one Passover means that God and Jesus are now able to have a relationship with us that transcends our human limitations of love.

We are the fulfillment of God's work in us if His *agape* love is perfected in us: “And we have known and have believed the love that God has toward us. God is love, and the one who dwells in love is dwelling in God, and God in him. **By this spiritual indwelling, the love of God is perfected within us,** so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment **because even as He is, so also are we** in this world.” (1 John 4:16-17).

Let God's *agape* love *reign* in your heart!