

A NEW COMMANDMENT

Jesus Christ clearly stated the two great commandments from which all the Law is derived:

MATTHEW 22:36-40 “Teacher, which *is* the great commandment in the law?” 37 Jesus said to him, “**You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.**’ 38 “This is *the* first and great commandment. 39 “And *the* second *is* like it: **You shall love your neighbor as yourself.**’ 40 “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

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:

JOHN 13:34-35 “A **new commandment** I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

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 does not mention their *neighbors*. Why did Jesus single out the relationships of disciples? Were the disciples so hardhearted 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 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:

MATTHEW 5:43-48 43 “You have heard that it was said [*in times past*], ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 “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, 45 “that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 “For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 “And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more *than others*? Do not even the tax collectors do so? 48 “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

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:

LEVITICUS 19:18 ‘... you shall love your neighbor **as yourself**: I *am* the LORD.

Now, examine what Jesus said to the disciples:

JOHN 13:34-35 “A **new commandment** I give to you, that you love one another; **as I have loved you**, that you also love one another. 35 “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

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:

1 JOHN 4:7-8 Beloved, let us love one another, for **love is of God**; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 **He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.**

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 the 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 His work:

MATTHEW 5:17 “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy 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 without the Holy Spirit; 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 "Then He said to them, "With *fervent* desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer"" (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:

1 JOHN 4:16-17 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. 17 **Love has been perfected among us** in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; **because as He is, so are we** in this world.

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

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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