

A NEW COMMANDMENT

INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians 13:4 (NLT) Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud 5 or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. 6 It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. 7 Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

What a beautiful passage, written masterfully under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by the Apostle Paul. It's incredibly inspiring. Thousands of sermons have been preached about it, songs have been written about it, it has been woven into paintings, handcraft and artwork over the years and it will continue being a perpetual inspiration.

But words are just words until they become action. In the book of James we are challenged to not only be hearers of the Word, but to be doers of the, word. The true beauty of this passage is found in it being applied and lived out in the lives of people.

For those of us that have been inspired by these words about love, they contain an ongoing, lifelong challenge. Are these words a reality in our lives, our actions and deeds, or are they just words we love to read and hear, but we find difficult to live out personally? Today we will examine their importance and the reason why we need to prioritise a lifestyle of walking in love.

MESSAGE

WHAT MAKES LOVE SO IMPORTANT?

God is love

1 John 4:8 (NKJV) He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

Quite simply, love is important because God is love. If we don't love, we don't know God.

If we love, it's a confirmation that we are born of God – God's children

1 John 4:7 (NKJV) Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

If we love, it's a sign to others that we are disciples of Christ Jesus.

John 13:35 (NKJV) By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

We can say we are disciples or followers of Christ until we are blue in the face, but the infallible truth is that until people can see that we have love for one

another, they won't necessarily believe us, and any ministry opportunities we may have are drastically reduced. They are even further reduced if they see us fighting, arguing, being self-centred or arrogant. These are not attributes of the disciples of Jesus Christ.

Love is the greatest commandment.

Matthew 22:36-40 (NKJV) "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 neighbour as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

The greatest and second greatest commandment is love. This is important stuff. In fact, for the child of God, love is an imperative!

Is love important to you and I? When last did we focus on love instead of just focusing on our needs, problems and challenges?

A NEW LEVEL OF LOVE

John 13:34 (NKJV) A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

Jesus answered the lawyer's question about the greatest commandment being love. Why then did He give love was a new commandment?

It's so important that He repeats it: **John 15:12** (NKJV) This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

- The first commandment was "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind".
- The word "your" is repeated three times – this speaks of our personal ability to love.
- But Jesus is raising the standard of love! No longer is He saying, "love the way you do", He is saying, "love the way that I do!".

This is a whole new level of love and that's why it's a new commandment.

There is no greater level of love!

John 15:13 (NKJV) Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

The greatest level of love is to lay one's life down for their friends! Jesus fulfilled this love by laying down His own life on the cross for us.

Jesus went on to tell the disciples how to be His friends.

John 15:14 (NKJV) You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.

When we do what Jesus commands us to do, we are His friends. His commandment to us is to love like He does!

John 14:21 (NLT) Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them.”

- When we obey Jesus Christ and learn to love like He does, our Heavenly Father will see it and respond in love toward us.
- Jesus will respond in love too and we will encounter Him as He reveals Himself to us.

Do you understand why Jesus needed to give a new commandment? Do you realize that a new level of love is required from us, a love that goes beyond our character and links into His character and His ability to love?

JESUS DOES NOT EXPECT THE IMPOSSIBLE

How is it possible to love like Jesus? Surely, He is the pinnacle of what love is? Surely, He proved it on the cross?

But it's not impossible. We have help: **John 14:15-16** (NKJV) “If you love Me, keep My commandments. 16 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—

Linked to His instruction to keep His commandments if we love Him, Jesus promises us another Helper – the Holy Spirit.

- The Holy Spirit's help is a key to walking in obedience.
- The Holy Spirit's help is a key to walking in love.
- What may seem impossible for us, is possible with God.
- We can walk in love like Jesus did.

This help is not temporary, Jesus said, the Holy Spirit will abide with us forever.

Are you struggling to walk in love? Are you struggling to love like Jesus does? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you. God does not think we will fail, He gives us ability to do the impossible.

WHAT DOES THIS NEW LEVEL OF LOVE LOOK LIKE?

Jesus' ultimate love example was the cross. He lived out His love to the ultimate and gave everything for us.

God's love for us is revealed in this scripture: **Romans 5:8** (NKJV) But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

I was reminded of the story of Racheltjie de Beer a young Voortrekker girl who was part of a trek from the Orange Free State to the south-eastern Transvaal. During one of their nightly stopovers, the members of the trek realised that a calf called Frik, much-beloved by their children, was missing. A search party was formed, in which Rachel and her six-year-old brother also took part. However, during the gathering dusk Rachel and her brother got separated from the search party and became lost. As the night progressed it got very cold and started snowing. Realizing that their chances of survival were slim, Racheltjie found an anthill hollowed out by a warthog, took off her clothes, put them on her brother and commanded him to get into the hollowed-out anthill. She then lay in front of the opening of the anthill in order to keep out the cold. The children were found the next morning by the trekking party. Racheltjie was dead, but her brother had survived. Her love for her brother reflected the love of Jesus Christ who willingly laid down His life for us.

Most of us will never have to physically lay our life down for our friends or loved ones. But Jesus said that if we want to follow Him, we need to pick up our cross on a daily basis. This speaks of living the crucified life.

The crucified life means we must crucify our flesh, dealing with the me, myself and I, and we must put others first.

We can do this in many ways:

- Husbands can be kind and understanding towards their wife and children instead of demanding that all is done their way.
- We may have plans to go somewhere, do something or buy something, and lay them aside so that we can help someone in need.
- We can sacrifice by meeting needs of others and forgoing our own needs, even if our own need may be more urgent and pressing.
- We can forgive, even when we are not in the wrong.

Many challenges faced in church congregations are because this "New Commandment Love" is absent.

- People who cause offense are not putting others first.
- People choosing to take offense are not putting others first.
- There is often a lack of godly generosity and believers are willing to allow others to suffer when they themselves have plenty.
- These are only a few examples.

Is it possible that this is why Jesus confronted the church about leaving its first love?

Revelation 2:1-4 (NKJV) "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 2 "I know your works, your labour, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have laboured for My name's sake and have not become weary. 4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

Is it possible that Jesus was saying, "you are not loving one another as I have loved you"?

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO?

- We must ask God to examine us and show us if we are walking in the new kind of love. **Psalms 139:23-24** (NKJV) Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; 24 And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.
- We must ask the Holy Spirit to help us walk in love and obey the new commandment.
- We must learn to love once again. It means dying to self and self-centredness and putting others first once again.

CONCLUSION

This is the new commandment – to love one another as Christ Jesus has loved us.

Jesus is inviting us to live out this new level of love from today onwards. It goes beyond loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. It goes to loving one another as Jesus loved us.

We can only do it with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Are we willing today to say, "Lord, I lay myself down at Your altar once again and return to the love I once had, I put your word first and I will display my love to you by my love for others"?

Let's begin today. As we love at this level, we will experience a new level of love from our Heavenly Father and life will take on a new sense of joy and fulfilment as we learn to walk in love.