

A New Commandment

Jesus 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’ ” (Matt. 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 (I John 4:8, 16). So the “Law of Love” has existed eternally.

However, consider what Jesus said after Judas left the table during 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 it new? The “Law of Love” 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 the disciples? Were the disciples so hardhearted that they needed to be admonished to love one another? Was Jesus implying that they didn’t need to love their neighbors?

Jesus came to teach the spiritual application of the Law; so a *new commandment* is not only surprising, but critical for Christians to understand. The “Law of Love” is fulfilled in keeping God’s commandments (John 14:15); so a “new commandment” of love is really a conundrum—because the commandments were given thousands of years ago.

Notice: “You have heard that it was said, ‘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 despitefully 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” (Matt. 5:43-48).

These passages confirm that Jesus wasn’t telling the disciples to only show love among themselves; instead, they were to show love toward *all* mankind. So we are still left with the question: what is the *new commandment*? The answer to that lies in comparing what was said in the beginning to what Jesus said during the Passover. Look at what God said originally: “[You] shall love your neighbor **as yourself. I am the LORD**” (Lev. 19:18).

Now look again at what Jesus told 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. By this shall everyone know that you are My disciples—if you love one another” (John 13:34-35).

The original commandment was based on love of *self*, something the Israelites could understand. Only those begotten of God are able to understand the *love of 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”** (I John 4:7-8).

It is only with God’s Spirit in us that anyone can understand the *agape* of God. That 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 loved us!* The “new commandment” is that we show *agape* love toward brothers and sisters in Christ. In fact, the Greek word for *new* does not mean the opposite of *old*, as in age. It can mean *unheard of* or *fresh*. This was something the world had never heard. The standard for the “Law of Love” was no longer based upon physical, human behavior—but upon *God*. Through this “new commandment,” Jesus completed the work He mentioned in Matthew 17: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.”

The original commandment to love our neighbor *as ourselves* is reserved for the unconverted because they do not have the *agape* love of God in them. However, the begotten children of God have something that transcends human love. Because of our special relationship with God, we not only have a command to show *agape* to our brethren, we also have a need and a desire to do so—just like God. “With *earnest* desire I have desired” (Luke 22:15)—to show *agape* unto us.

Brethren, we fulfill God’s work in us if we perfect His *agape* 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**” (I John 4:16-17).

Let God’s *agape* reign in our hearts!