

John 12 – A New Commandment**12/21/2025****Scripture 1: (Jn. 13:31-35 ESV)**

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 glorify him at once. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so 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: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Westminster Shorter Catechism:

Q. 39. *What is the duty which God requireth of man?*

A. The duty which God requireth of man, is obedience to his revealed will.

Q. 40. *What did God at first reveal to man for the rule of his obedience?*

A. The rule which God at first revealed to man for his obedience, was the moral law.

Q. 41. *Wherein is the moral law summarily comprehended?*

A. The moral law is summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments.

Q. 42. *What is the sum of the Ten Commandments?*

A. The sum of the Ten Commandments is, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind; and our neighbor as ourselves.

Sermon:

Jesus' earthly ministry has reached its turning point. Up until now His ministry has been completely public, even as some of the truths He taught were obscured within parables (Matthew 13:10-17), they were still publicly available to anyone with "...ears to hear..." (Matt. 11:15 ESV). However, Jesus was now left alone with just His believing disciples. Judas was gone, having just left to betray Jesus; to hand Him over to the enemies of God. But this early Christian fellowship was not broken; it had simply been refined and purified. Judas was gone and Jesus' chosen few were being made whole, as He completed their spiritual education.

Over the remainder of this Passover evening, Jesus will further explain the idea that underlies His whole miraculous ministry (John 5:18-23, 5:26, 8:14-19, 8:54); a concept that is foundational to our faith and trust in Him: His deity and His union with the LORD, God the Father. Remember, more importantly than "filling in the gaps" of Jesus's life and ministry with additional details, John's purpose in recording these specific seven, miraculous signs performed by Jesus, was to demonstrate that Jesus is God (John 2:23, 3:2, 4:48) and, that each of the seven recorded "I AM" statements was a specific claim of equality with God the Father. However, while they were claims of deity, they could also reasonably be interpreted merely as claims to possess delegated, divine authority as a prophet and agent of God. This contemporary ambiguity is what enabled Jesus to continue to operate publicly, despite growing opposition by the religious authorities. He did not advocate it, but others could convincingly argue for a case of "plausible deniability" regarding Jesus's claim.

Then, after Judas left, Jesus began His valediction, saying, "*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 glorify him at once.*". While this may sound confusing or even seem superfluous, Jesus once again asserts His claim of divinity through the use of a circular argument.

- Jesus begins first by saying that the Son of Man, He Himself, is glorified.
 - He is glorified; meaning that He has been given glory and He is being given glory.
 - He is glorified; meaning that His glorification is both complete and continuing.
- Then He asserts that the LORD God is glorified by the Son of Man's glory, in Him.
 - God is glorified when the Son of Man is glorified; the Son's glory is God's glory.
 - God is glorified by Him; the Son glorifies God with the glory that He Himself is given.
- After this, a conditional statement is inserted, "*If God is glorified in Him...*". However, while this clause that is not found in some earlier manuscripts, neither its presence or absence alters the meaning of the text because the stated condition is objectively true.
- To close the circle of the argument, Jesus declares that God will glorify the Son of Man, "*...in Himself*".
 - The Son of Man will be glorified by God, with God's own glory.
 - The Son of Man is being glorified by God, with God's own glory.
 - The Son of Man has been glorified by God, with God's own glory.
 - Meanwhile, the Son of Man glorifies God, in turn.
- Then, concluding His assertion, He proclaims that God will glorify Him "*...at once.*"

- The Son of Man is glorified by God, with God's own glory, immediately. Therefore, He is glorified eternally because the glory of God, like God Himself, is eternal and everlasting.

All together, Jesus is claiming that the glory of the Son of Man, is God's glory, and that God's glory, is the Son of Man's glory. Thus Jesus claimed equality with God again, but remember, equality is not equivalency. As He claimed God's glory, He also claimed God's divinity and eternality. By claiming God's glory, Jesus claimed equality and union with God the Father, but He did not claim to be the Father; they are still both one God, yet two distinct Persons. So, the Father glorifies the Son, in Himself. The Son glorifies the Father, as the Father glorifies Himself, glorifying the Son. The Father and the Son are together glorified and, they are glorified together, as one.

- Therefore, we believe that the LORD is God and Jesus is God. Together they are eternally glorified and they are glorified eternally. Two distinct divine Persons, but only one Substance *{homoousios}* as God.

This is where our unique Christian doctrine of the Trinity begins to be formulated and explained in Scripture. Meanwhile, the theme of Jesus's unity and union with God the Father, of Jesus being God, will continue to flow through and unite the whole of Jesus's teaching after His "Last Supper".

After (re)introducing His claim of divinity, Jesus turned to His eleven faithful disciples and proclaimed, "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*".

Jesus began this discourse by re-asserting His divinity, because His equality and union with God the Father is the source for and justification of His authority; justifying His authority to establish, pronounce, and enforce commandments as the only sovereign LORD. This is critical because Isaiah tells us that "*For the LORD is our judge; the LORD is our lawgiver; the LORD is our king; he will save us.*" (Isa. 33:22 ESV) {a fact reaffirmed by James (4:12)}, therefore, only God may issue us a "new commandment". God alone has the right and ability to issue commands to His creation: to tell us what we may or may not, and what we must do; and He alone has the wisdom to justly punish those who remain disobedient.

- The divinity of Jesus, Him being God: the *Logos* who is *Theos* and *Andros*; is the cornerstone of the Church's entire foundation.
- The claim of divinity by Jesus, of Him being the LORD God, was not a later development or mythological fabrication.
- The fact of Jesus being God was understood and taught plainly by the Apostles.
- The fact of Jesus being God is critical to every Christian doctrine because without it, our whole faith fails and salvation becomes impossible.

Therefore Jesus, as the LORD God: the only judge and the righteous lawgiver; now issues a "*new commandment*" to His disciples, that they must "*love one another*". But was this command really "new"?

Later John, in his first letter, will describe this "*new commandment*" to love, while calling it "new", as also being the same "*old commandment that [we have] had from the beginning.*" (1 John 2:7-11). The Synoptic Gospels affirm the understanding that God's people have been clearly commanded to "...*love your neighbor as yourself...*" (Lev. 19:18 ESV; Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27) ever since Leviticus.

But perhaps, maybe they did not understand or remember this commandment? Maybe the 1st Century Jews found it difficult to read through Leviticus during their annual Torah reading, finding it difficult like so many of us today?

No, I do not think that is the problem. Instead, what I think the actual problem is and, why Jesus calls this a “*new commandment*”, is that while they already knew that they were supposed to “love” their neighbors, they did not rightly understand how they were expected to love them. That was the clear message of the “Good Samaritan” story in Luke 10. They just did not understand what “love” really is. So now, Jesus would newly explain the old command. When Jesus gave them a “*new commandment*”, not only did He explain it, but He told them that He had already demonstrated it. Jesus told them, “...just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.”. Jesus had been practicing what He was preaching throughout His entire ministry.

- Now, just as a reminder, the kind of “love” that is being commanded in this passage is the Greek verb *agapao* or as the noun *agape*. *Agape* is a selfless and sacrificial kind of love; a love that prioritizes the well-being of others and gives them a higher regard; a love which is characterized by loyalty and covenant faithfulness, as also found in the Hebrew concept of *chesed*, instead of emotional fondness or sexual desire.

So, to understand Jesus' command, we need to remember and consider all of Jesus' many examples of *agape*. But while examples of such love are not often identified by name in John's Gospel, Jesus' exemplary *agape* for others is demonstrated plainly throughout.

- The most recent example was when Jesus washed the disciples' feet, an occurrence that could not have been driven from their memory yet. After He finished washing them, when He explained the meaning of what He had just done, Jesus told them, “*For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.*” (Jn. 13:15 ESV), in other words saying, “...just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.”.
 - The example that Jesus set before them showed how humbly serving others can be an act of *agape* and also how redeeming, purifying, or helping others to become sanctified is a great work of *agape*; showing that we should not allow our personal pridefulness to prevent us from helping or loving any other person.
- Back when Lazarus was sick and near death, John explained that “...Jesus loved [agape'd] Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.” (Jn. 11:5-6 ESV). However, this is an exceptionally difficult example of *agape* for us to emulate since, when Jesus heard that Lazarus was dying, because He *agape'd* the trio, He delayed going to them knowing that Lazarus would die. But Jesus did not delay so that His friends would needlessly suffer, but so that they might learn and know for certain exactly who He is. He delayed in order to show the *agape* of God by restoring the dead to physical life and to fill us up with the confident hope that He will also raise us up to spiritual life.
 - The example which Jesus set on this occasion demonstrated how experience is often a better teacher than mere instruction. Sometimes, people gain and retain knowledge by simply being told or by reading, but the lessons that are learned from lived experience: especially hard, difficult, or unpleasant lessons; are rarely forgotten. We may be told a hundred times that the stove is hot but, until we burn ourselves, we do not believe it; we are not willing to confidently trust the truth of it.
- Then, there were the seven miraculous Signs that the Evangelist has faithfully recorded for us, when Jesus: turned water into wine at Cana, healed a Capernaum official's son by His word alone, healed an invalid at Bethesda, fed a crowd near Bethsaida, walked across the Sea of Galilee, gave sight to a man born blind, and resurrected Lazarus from the dead.
 - Jesus showed *agape* at Cana by preserving the honor {"face"} of the wedding's host and by facilitating the continuing celebration, exemplifying hospitality as *agape*.

- Jesus showed *agape* to the official and his family by restoring a sick child to wellness and good health, exemplifying how providing medical care and supporting wellness may be *agape*.
- Jesus showed *agape* to the invalid man by showing him compassion and mercy; by “seeing him” when he had been passed by and ignored by others for thirty-eight years. He satisfied the man's need for validation, for having his humanity recognized and affirmed, exemplifying how charity and simple kindness can be *agape*, by honoring the Image of God found within every person and respecting the inherent value of every human life.
- Jesus showed *agape* to the crowd by having compassion on them, by providing for and satisfying their hunger, exemplifying how helping to provide for the physical needs of others, like hunger, is *agape*.
- Jesus showed *agape* to His disciples when He walked out to their wave-tossed boat and calmed the storm, exemplifying how helping to provide for the physical needs of others, like providing them with shelter or other protection from the elements, is *agape*.
- Jesus showed *agape* to the young man who had been born blind, not just by giving him sight, but by also illuminating his entire world. Receiving sight, the man's opportunity to learn and grow in knowledge and understanding, within his social context, was dramatically increased. Receiving sight, the man's opportunity to work, provide for himself and a family, and to become a productive (contributing) member of society increased dramatically. Jesus exemplified, within this story, the *agape* power found in giving illumination: through providing and encouraging education and study; through facilitating the gain of wisdom and understanding; through promoting people's “betterment”.
- Jesus showed *agape* to Martha and Mary when He restored their brother, Lazarus, to life. He exemplified how comforting those who mourn, especially by encouraging them with hope of the resurrection life, through faith in Jesus Christ, is *agape*.
- Lastly, or perhaps firstly, through all of these things and by each of these examples, Jesus demonstrated how God loves us: how He *agape*'s all of His human creation; through His provision of common grace.
 - God is not “so great”, that He abandons His responsibility to take care of and provide for His creation He wants us to know His *agape*.
 - In the grace of *agape*, God provides us with the freedom of will to choose and make our own decisions, allowing us to make mistakes and suffer the natural consequences, so that we might learn from our errors and failures; learning to choose what is good and to reject that which is evil.
 - In the grace of *agape*, God provides us with hospitality and He provides all of our earthly joys, so that we might seek Him out and the true Joy that He alone provides.
 - In the grace of *agape*, God provides for our health and well-being by providing us with medicines, various healing practices, as well as the knowledge and wisdom to correctly apply them in different situations and circumstances.
 - In the grace of *agape*, God provides all humanity with a inherent desire to be kind and charitable towards others; to know what is right, good, and honorable; to recognize the value in human life.
 - In the grace of *agape*, God also provides us with the ability be kind or charitable, to do what is right, and to preserve or defend life, yet He leaves us with the freedom to choose whether or not we do so.

- God also gave us His Son, Jesus, not just to be the only, truly righteous example for us to follow but, to do all of these works of *agape* for us: for our good benefit; to be the living, perfect personification of *agape* itself (1 John 4:8).

Through His works of *agape*, Jesus glorified God the Father, the Sovereign LORD, obeying the same “*new commandment*” that He was giving to His disciples. Therefore, since *agape* is obedience to God and obedience is our means to show honor and give glory to the LORD God, then to *agape* (to love) is to give glory (to glorify). This means that, the glory which is given, received, and shared between the Father and Son is a sign of the love that they have for one another.

A second reason that Jesus began this discourse by asserting His deity: His perfect union and unity with God the Father; is because now He pivots towards the disciples' imperfect unity with Him, saying, “*By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*”. Within a Christian's union to Christ, as Jesus glorifies God the Father through His obedience of *agape*; as God the Father glorifies God the Son through His *agape* of Him (John 3:35, 5:20, 10:17); so Jesus' disciples glorify Christ by emulating His example of obedient *agape* since, by having “*love/agape for one another*”, we prove ourselves as belonging to and being united into Christ.

- Therefore, if we are proven to belong to Christ, to be united with Christ, because we *agape* one another, then it is proven that we belong to God; that we are His chosen/Elect children of adoption.
- So, if we believe that God *agape*'s us, and if we respond to God's *agape* by *agape*-ing one another, then through our good works of *agape* we are giving glory to Jesus Christ and God, our Father in heaven.
- Still greater than this, if we believe that God *agape*'s us, and if we glorify Him in response to His merciful grace, then we know that He glorifies us just as He glorifies God the Son. Believing and knowing that because God *agape*'s us and glorifies us, our sinful, covetous desire and preference for the glory which comes from men (John 12:43) will ideally be reduced and eventually removed entirely.
 - When we are loved by God and when we love God in return, then God's love is what we most desire.
 - Human love is fleeting and fickle, but God's love is eternal and unchanging.
 - When we glorify God, when we glorify Jesus Christ, and we believe that He glorifies us with His own glory, then His glory is what we desire most to be increased.
 - Human glory is very temporary, because it either quickly fades or is taken away. The “glory of men” is never satisfying because, there is never enough for everyone to have as much as they desire; because human glory is always measured by comparison, while God's glory remains greatest.

But, since Jesus is the “*good shepherd*” (John 10:14) who knows His own and whose own knows Him, to whom are we to prove that we are Christ's disciples, that we belong to Him?

Jesus told us that if we “*...have love for one another...*”, then “*...all people will know...*”, and this is an occasion when “*all people*” actually means “*all people*”: believers and non-believers alike, Christians and non-Christians, the Elect and the Reprobate, the righteous and the wicked. If we *agape* one another and if we *agape* others, then everyone will know that we belong to Jesus.

So, how are we to keep this “*new commandment*” and obey Christ?

First, we must remember that this commandment does not negate or replace the “old” commandments, they continue to remain in force. Instead of replacing the “old”, this “*new commandment*” augments, overlays, and explains what has always been expected by the “old” commandments. This one “*new commandment*” actually

makes the many older ones easier to keep, by simplifying and consolidating them into one single command. Since this “*new commandment*” is “...to love one another...” as Jesus has first loved us, that consolidates and re-frames the whole “second table” of the Law into one positive command: to *agape*.

Again, this new command to love does not replace the old one because obviously:

- dishonoring your father and mother is unloving;
- committing murder is unloving;
- committing adultery is unloving;
- stealing is unloving, lying is unloving;
- and coveting other people's stuff is unloving;

each of those are definitely not *agape*. But, since our *agape* also glorifies the LORD God, who *agape*'s and glorifies us, this “*new commandment*” likewise consolidates and re-frames the “first table” into the same singular, positive command because:

- having other gods besides the one true God, is unloving towards God;
- making and worshiping images or idols of the one true invisible God, when He does not want us to, is gross disobedience and unloving towards God;
- taking the LORD's Name in vain, using it falsely or fraudulently, is unloving towards God;
- failing to sanctify His chosen holy day, choosing to not obediently rest when God Himself chose to rest, is gross disobedience and unloving towards God.

Each of those are also definitely, not *agape*.

Therefore, since all of the prohibition commandments are consolidated and re-framed into a single positive command, we know that it is not good enough for us to just not do those things, to be obediently righteous. We do not keep the commandments of God, by simply not breaking them. No, instead we are commanded to act positively through *agape* by Christ.

- We must worship the LORD God, alone; Him **only**.
- We must worship the LORD God in the way that He desires, just as He has prescribed for us to worship Him, according to His Word in Scripture.
- We must use His Name rightly, instead of avoiding all mention of it. We may invoke His Name in lawful oaths, confirming our true, good intentions to keep our promises.
- We must honor His Sabbath command. We must rest because God Himself rested. We must use that time for worship and study; to grow in our faith; to strengthen our relationship with and our love for Him. We must help our family's to rest and worship and grow, as well, but not in a legalistic or restrictive way, because the LORD has given us the Sabbath as a blessing, not a curse (Mark 2:27).
- We must honor, respect, and obey our parents and all other “superiors” as a way to honor the LORD.
- We must work to defend and preserve human life by all lawful and reasonable means, especially innocent life. However, matters of justice and enacting punishment of the wicked by means of the sword, is the duty of governing authorities and therefore, a necessary exception because they act as the LORD's representative.

- We each must work to preserve the chastity of our own heart and mind, as we defend or protect the chastity and purity of others. We must repent of our past immoralities and flee from their temptation in the future.
- We must preserve and defend the property rights of others, as well as our own. While Christians are called by the LORD to be charitable, kind, and generous it is our responsibility to willingly and gladly do so. We cannot be compelled to unjustly surrender our property for the benefit of others, to our own detriment.
 - Forced or compulsory redistribution of wealth is not equivalent to Christian charity.
 - Government welfare programs, funded by taxpayers, is not equivalent to Christian charity.
- We must be truthful in everything that we say and imply. Honesty is always the best policy.
- We are also called to contentment. We must choose to be satisfied with what we have and, with whatever more the LORD will graciously provide us. That is not to say that we should forego ambition, or that we should not desire to improve our social status or economic circumstance, but rather, that we are not to make the accumulation of wealth and property our life's goal or purpose. Yet, while our tangible blessings may increase, we are not to increase them at the expense of other people.

Second, we need to intentionally “*love one another*” even, and especially, when it feels hard to do. We need to *agape* each other within the Church, within our congregation, and we need to *agape* others who are outside of the Church, outside of the faith. We all need *agape* others however we are able, according to each of our individual gifts, to the best of our ability and capacity. We might comfort others when they are grieving. Visit or help those who are sick and injured. Teach and disciple our fellow believers. Cook meals for shut-ins or open our homes to guests. Mow our neighbor's lawn for them. Or, a person can help to pack food boxes at the Salvation Army or volunteer to tutor the kids at the Salvation Army's Learning Zone. There are countless options and opportunities for us to *agape* others, to obediently follow Jesus's example.

But, third and most importantly, we must always remember that such good works are not good in and of themselves, they become good only because they are being done to God's glory, in our love for Jesus Christ. That is what separates our acts of Christian service from being mere worldly (godless) charity, *agape*. Our goals, our motivations, our intentions for acting must always be grounded in our love for one another, in our love for Christ.

Therefore, to best keep this positive “*new commandment*” given by Jesus, in everything we do we must “...*do all to the glory of God.*” (1 Cor. 10:31 ESV) and do all for the love of God.

AMEN