

Student Work

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By Our Love

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Josh Bootsma

Daily Scripture Texts

[Psalm 15](#)

[Micah 3:1-4](#)

[John 13:31-35](#)

"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." John 13:34-35

Love. What a loaded word—perhaps so loaded that its true meaning has been lost entirely. We love “that scarf.” We love “that new Mustang.” “That new carpet in the church sanctuary”, or (secretly) “McDonald’s french fries.” These things gain our approval and in so doing they also gain our so-called love.

Of course, any Christian will tell you that they know that these “loves” are not true loves, that real love is something different entirely. And we all know what love is; or, at least, we claim to. But Jesus tells us that love is the greatest characteristic of a Christian, and thus it’s always worth reflecting upon.

By the event of our passage from the end of John 13, Jesus has already washed his disciples’ feet and has exposed Judas’s plot to betray him. It’s at this point that Jesus tells his disciples to love, and it is easy to see these two verses as exactly that: another summary of the law similar to that in Matthew 28, a summation of commandments five through ten—that is, to love God and to love your neighbor. And although Jesus’s words are not any less than that, they certainly are much more.

Jesus is doing at least two things in these verses regarding the command to love. First, he is explaining the credibility of the command, and second, he is elevating the standard for it.

Jesus is explaining the credibility of the command when he says, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” Love is the single greatest evidence that can be given for being a Christian. The early 2000’s song had it right when it said, “they will know we are Christians by our love.” They won’t know by our doctrine, our piety, or perfect church attendance, but by our love. Francis Schaeffer said, “We must never forget that the final apologetic which Jesus gives is the observable love of true Christians for true Christians.” There is no greater defense of our Christian faith than our love for each other.

It might seem odd to some, though, that Jesus refers to this command as a new one. After all, we can look back as far as Leviticus 19 to read, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” So what about this command is new?

Jesus is not claiming the command to love is somehow a new idea. Rather, he’s saying the standard for the command is new. No longer are God’s people to love their neighbors as themselves; instead, they are to love one another as Christ has loved them. Never before has the standard been this high. By giving this new command, Jesus is forever changing the way Christians think about love. Before, love for others was measured by love for yourself. Now, the measure for your love for others is Christ’s love for you. A real standard-raiser if ever there was one.

The next question, then, is how did Christ love us? We can’t begin to love others until we begin to understand how

He has loved us. For this, as in all things, we look to Scripture. John 13:1 tells us “having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” Christ didn’t just love us, he loved us *to the end*. He loved us to the end of his life, and in fact, his love caused the end of his life.

There’s a temptation to view Christ’s great sacrifice to save us as a testimony to how much we are worth in his eyes. But that’s far from the truth. Rather, his sacrifice illustrates how much it cost to save us. Christ didn’t have to sacrifice *some* of himself to redeem us. Our sin and wretchedness required he give it all. Nothing short of the ultimate humiliation of death on a cross could satisfy the wrath of God.

Jesus looked us in our ugly, depraved, sinful, unworthy faces and loved us to death. He died for us, the worst of sinners, and he did so out of love.

Love, then, is lavishing yourself upon someone who is unworthy and unattractive. It’s loving to the end—that is, to death. It’s looking your fellow Christians in their sinful faces and deciding that your love is greater than their greatest sins. It’s taking Christ’s love for you that has gripped your heart, and letting it steer your actions, thoughts, and words toward other people. Simply, it’s giving up yourself for the sake of others, just as Christ did for you.

May our most precious gift truly be our highest responsibility, that we might give credence to our apologetic and might be a picture, however flawed, of Christ’s perfect and unconditional love for his people.