

Eternity Daily Bible Study

(A ministry of Eternity Christian Fellowship)

Walking In The Spirit - 100

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Topic: A New Commandment

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It has taken fully one month to write this last installment in the Walking In The Spirit series. Life certainly has been hectic here! Today's devotional is the end of one series (Walking In The Spirit) and a transition to the next series (Walking In The Commandments of Jesus Christ). God willing, my future writing will be a bit more regular. This next series should be around 50-60 studies over about four to five months. The final Walking In The Spirit workbook should be ready by the end of this week. Your prayers for its completion would be appreciated.

John 13:34-35 MKJV *I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. As I have loved you, you should also love one another. (35) By this all shall know that you are My disciples, if you have love toward one another.*

The new commandment is that Christians should love ("agape") one another. This is a higher love than the social requirement to love your neighbor as yourself (though it is certainly related). The Good Samaritan fulfilled the requirement to love his neighbor yet there is no indication of a permanent ongoing relationship being established. There was no reciprocity over time (which is what the "one another" concept implies). In Christian community we both give and receive, we love and are loved, we encourage one another and are encouraged, pray for one another and are prayed for. Things go back and forth between us.

Generally agape love in the gospels and epistles implies a continuing relationship such as that between Jesus and his disciples, Christ and the Church, or the love between a married couple. Agape love assumes the other is a more or less permanent part of one's life. The relationship is unconditional, ongoing and intentional. There is definite clear commitment to the welfare of the other person over time. Its a lot more than a handshake and a smile. In fact new commandment love is to be a reflection of Christ's love for the Church. It is to be "as I have loved you" - with all the sacrifice that implies:

1 John 3:16-18 ISV *This is how we have come to know love: Christ gave his life for us. We, too, ought to give our lives for our brothers. (17) Whoever has earthly possessions and notices a brother in need and yet withholds his compassion from him, how can the love of God remain in him? (18) Little children, we must stop loving in word and in tongue, but instead love in action and in truth.*

This "one another" love is to be a life of active sacrifice for the blessing of the saints!

The "brother" here is the fellow Christian that you are in relationship with. It is quite impossible to have fervent love for every person on earth (though we should do good to them as we have the power and opportunity to do so).

Galatians 6:10 ISV *So then, whenever we have the opportunity, let us practice doing good to everyone, especially to the family of faith.*

The "love one another" command (in contrast to the more general "love thy neighbor" command) is especially for the Christian community. It is only addressed to a group of people who know each other well such as the disciples (John 13:34,35, 15:12, 15:17) or to a church (Romans 13:8, Galatians 5:13, 1 Peter 1:22, 1 John 3:11,14,23; 4:7,11,12).

Thus it is a new commandment because it creates a new community. Love one another creates an intense local community of Christian believers and disciples who follow the commandments of Jesus- the church!

1 Peter 1:22 ISV *Now that you have obeyed the truth and have purified your souls to love your brothers sincerely, you must love one another intensely and with a pure heart.*

So now we do not merely love "as you love yourself" - but rather we go up a notch and we love others as Christ has loved us - "as I have loved you". This "as I have loved you" is the new light that shines into our hearts and elevates our love to new levels:

1 John 2:7-8 ISV *Dear friends, I am not writing to you a new commandment, but an old commandment that you have had from the beginning. This old commandment is the word you have heard. (8) On the other hand, I am writing to you a new commandment that is true in him and in you. For the darkness is fading away, and the true light is already shining.*

This new kind of love follows the example of Christ and His commandments:

2 John 1:5-6 MKJV *And now I beseech you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another. (6) And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, as you heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it.*

Such love cannot be attained in the flesh but absolutely requires the presence and power of the Holy Spirit (which is why it is part of this Walking In The Spirit series). The supreme achievement of the Spirit-filled life is not miraculous power but is agape love:

1 Corinthians 13:2 ISV *If I have the gift of prophecy and can understand all secrets and every form of knowledge, and if I have absolute faith so as to move mountains but have no love, I am nothing.*

The new commandment calls us to love the saints as Christ loved us - and died for us. Ephesians 5 makes it plain that Christ loves the Church in this way and that husbands are to love their wives in such a manner. And the passage in 1 John 3:16-18 makes it clear that we are to love "the brethren" even to the extent that we are to give our lives (including this world's goods) for them.

Thus the church is meant to be a lot more than a lecture theatre where we go to listen to a great preacher perform, take a few notes and then go home. We are

not just to love and admire the preacher, we are to love the assembled brothers and sisters in Christ as well! There are over 50 verses in the NT that speak concerning our "one another" obligations (accept one another, encourage one another etc). So this "one another" part of church is a huge part of what we are actually there for!

Our "one another" agape love in Christian community is not some kind of vague sentimental mush. It is reverent, it is righteous and it is regulated: *And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments.*

It is reverent in that is focused on Jesus and on holy obedience to His commandments. It is righteous in that it addresses our behavior, that is it requires that we "walk" in a godly path. It is regulated in that we walk according to His commandments - and not according to our own whims, wishes or philosophy. We love God by taking Him seriously and doing what He has told us to do.

The new commandment calls us to live by a heavenly standard of perfection in love. We are to be perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:44-48) and to be holy as He is holy (1 Peter 1:15,16) and to even become partakers of the Divine nature:

2 Peter 1:3-8 MKJV *according as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who has called us to glory and virtue, (4) through which He has given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, so that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. (5) But also in this very thing, bringing in all diligence, filling out your faith with virtue, and with virtue, knowledge; (6) and with knowledge self-control, and with self-control, patience, and with patience, godliness, (7) and with godliness, brotherly kindness, and with brotherly kindness, love. (8) For if these things are in you and abound, they make you to be neither idle nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

We are called to follow a new commandment and to aspire to a high and holy life lived in fervent love as part of a living vital Christian community. The great and marvelous challenge is just how can we do this? The answer is: One commandment at a time, one person at a time and one church at a time. That will be the focus of my next teaching series: Walking In The Commandments of Jesus Christ!

Blessings,

[John Edmiston](#)

Chairman/ CEO Cybermissions

Pastor - Eternity Christian Fellowship

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