

Love One Another - Upper Room Discourse Principles found in the New Testament

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Introduction

Christ gave revelation to the disciples in the upper room the night before he went to the cross. This revelation was meant to introduce these men to doctrine that would be vitally important to building the church over the rest of their lives. He told them that they would not understand but that they would come into this knowledge later (13:7; 14:26; 2:22, 12:16; Acts 11:16) with the aid of the Holy Spirit. One of the foundational teachings Christ gave was the new commandment in 13:34. This commandment was one of a new kind (*kainos*). It was the keystone by which all men would know that they were disciples of His. This commandment was referenced throughout the rest of the New Testament in many books. John makes the clearest reference to it in his epistles, Paul also unfolds this doctrine throughout his books. Jesus tells them to love one another as He has loved them, showing them the washing of the feet, and the writers of the NT will lean into that and give other examples of what that love looks like.

The Law of Christ

In the book of Galatians, Paul directs those saints to bear one another's burdens, and fulfill the law of Christ (Gal 6:2). The context is the restoration of a fellow brother who has been overtaken in a fault. This type of behavior is an act of love that shows the love of Christ to another believer. He refers to himself in Corinthians as being under law to Christ (1 Cor 9:21). This passage shows Paul's sacrificial behavior to win men to Christ, a reference to the new commandment.

John the Beloved

John makes several references to the new commandment. 1 Jn 2:3-10, 3:14-18, 3:23, 4:7-12, 4:20, and 2 Jn 1:5 refer to the love Christ discussed with his disciples. John refers to the "beginning" in vs 7. This is the beginning of the current dispensation, the one that Christ was speaking about in the upper room. There are several "beginnings" spoken about in scripture, context is vital in discerning which is being referred to. It is clear to see that the beginning referred to in 2 Jn 1:5 was initiated by Christ himself by the context in verse 7.

With so many mentions in such short letters, it is clear to see the import that John places on this topic. The key phrase in 1 Jn 2 is in vs 6. John connects "abiding in him" to the believer's walk. This is a reference to Jn 14 abiding and being In Christ. The believer who is In Christ should be focusing on eternal things, at ease in his position. The believer who has not ordered their life (walk) around love is not living in the light, but in darkness.

In Chapter 3 John points out that the believer "in the light" will give to his brother in need (17-18). In verse 23-34 he flips the script, and says that the believer who is keeping God's commandments (loving as Christ loved) is spiritual, literally, Christ abides in them, or is at ease in them. John makes the same connection in chapter 4, we dwell in Him (vs 13) God dwells in us (15), and this is the definition of love, because God is love.

The Apostle Paul

In his epistles, Paul leans into this topic as well. Not only by naming the law the law of Christ as seen earlier, but in showing practical examples of what this love looks like. In Romans 12:9-10 and 1 Cor 13, Paul connects love to service, namely the spiritual gifts. Exercising the spiritual gift in the assembly towards the fellow believers is a practical outgrowth of giving your body to God as a living sacrifice (12:1-2). He lays out the body metaphor in verse 4, and then details how to direct service towards one another. Verses 9 and on are more practical, with examples of love that is not hypocritical. This continues to the remainder of the chapter.

In 1 Cor 13, Paul describes several characteristics of agape love. Verses 4-7 lay out exactly what the love of Christ looks like, and it is a daunting list. Patient, kind, not envious, not self centered, not prideful, not rude, not self seeking, not easily provoked, does not suspect evil, does not rejoice when injustice is done, but rejoices when the truth is advanced. Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things - this is a list that is not achievable outside of the power of God directed towards others.

Contrast between New and Great Commandments

Paul in Galatians 5:2 contrasts religious service with true love combined with faith. He tells this group that Christ has become of no effect to them, their sanctification has been stunted because they are advancing law keeping (the mosaic law) instead of the law of Christ. This argument is carried out through verse 15 ending in biting and devouring one another. Paul lays out a different way beginning in verse 16 with a spiritual walk. Love is included in the fruit of the Spirit. Verse 26 is similar to 1 Cor 13 in its description of love. James 2 also provides a contrast to the “royal law” leading to a respect of persons (2:8). The law of Christ has no such respect of persons.

The idea that love is present in the spiritual believer is continued in Ephesians 5:2. Paul leans in even more describing the spiritual believer - not drunk with wine, but praising, grateful, and submitting to authority.

Paul continues this same idea with the Colossians, equating faith in Christ to love for the saints (1:4). He continues in chapter 3 with the idea that love in action is actually “putting on Christ”. Aligning each behavior with that of the godhead.

The Mind of Christ

Paul directs the believer to have the mind of Christ in Philippians 2. The mind of Christ is the like minded approach of all believers who are to eliminate strife and vainglory, esteeming one another higher than themselves. Christ humbled himself and allowed God the Father to exalt Him. He did not advance his own agenda, but that of the Father. This is all an unfolding of the new commandment. We see the difference from the great commandment at every turn. This love is only possible with the character of Christ.

Enablement from Above

As Christ told the disciples- “without me ye can do nothing”, Paul reminds the Thessalonians that the love directed towards others is caused by the Lord (1 Thess 3:12). He causes this to increase more and more (4:9-10). In the second letter Paul gives thanks to God for the love of the Thessalonians again

linked with their faith (2 Thess 1:3). This is a perfect example of James describing faith without works is dead.

Maturity Leads to Love

The writer of Hebrews incites the believer beyond the first principles of Christ onto perfection - maturity (6:1). This is shown in agape love (vs 10). He uses the hortatory subjunctive to consider one another to provoke unto love and good works (10:24). The Hebrews were returning to the law of Moses to find their fulfillment in the Christian life, but the writer encourages them to find rest in the living of the principles of grace.

Peter Gets it Right

Peter struggled in the upper room, for he was under severe Satanic attack, and failed miserably. Christ was gracious to him, restoring him through a series of talks and visits culminating in the interaction in John 21 when Peter decided that he was returning to his old way of life. Peter, it seems, has decided to follow Christ (John 21:19). He writes in his epistles about love and touches in the topic in a similar way to the Apostle Paul. Peter is more direct, packing a lot of information into shorter sentences. In 1:22, Peter directs the believer to obey the Spirit and love with an unfeigned love, this being the outgrowth of the gospel (1:25).

In chapter 3 of the same letter, Peter tells the believer that love is the “one mind” that they should have towards one another (3:8-9). Listed here are many of the things Paul describes as characteristics of love in his letters.

Add to...

In his second letter, Peter connects many of the doctrines already studied here in his introduction (2 Peter 1:3-4). Through the power of God, the believer has all he needs to live a complete life of godliness, being able to live out the divine nature denying his lust and aspiring to divine virtues.

Verses 5-9 give a progression that should be present in every believer’s life that is focused on the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. The believer who is not adding these things (culminating in agape love), is living as if he were blind. This is similar to John’s description of the darkness instead of the light. Peter reminds the believer that the death of Christ does more than deliver him from hell, it enables him to live the present life with power and victory.

Conclusion

The repetition of these principles is no accident. The Comforter promised by Christ in the upper room was upholding the principles given there to those He was comforting. The Spirit inspired the NT writers to give more revelation on how to love another, what it looks like, and what it does not look like. This topic is probably referred to in the NT more than any other brought up by Christ in his discourse. It is the one factor that is given as the identifying mark of those who belong to Christ.