

THE THREE COMMANDMENTS OF JESUS
Mark 12:28-34, John 13:34-35, I John 3

When Moses led Israel's escape from slavery in Egypt they first came to the Sinai Peninsula where God gave them the Ten Commandments. Those Commandments were given to show things wrong in their lives, so 8 of the 10 begin by saying "You shall not." That's why Paul wrote, "By the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20).

Now aware of their sin, God again called Moses back to the mount and told him to build a tabernacle, establish a priesthood, and offer blood sacrifices on an altar to atone for sin. Beginning then and continuing fifteen centuries to the time of Jesus, sacrifices were offered every morning and evening to make atonement for their sin.

The New Testament tells us that our blood sacrifice is Jesus who died on the cross for our sin. Just as John the Baptist said of Jesus, "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

It's interesting to note that exactly 40 years after Jesus died for our sin, all priestly sacrifices in the temple ended as the Roman army destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, and the temple was never rebuilt. That's why Jewish synagogues don't have priests today.

As Moses emphasized the ten commandments that tell us what not to do, now Jesus gives three commandments, which instead of telling us what not to do, emphasize what we should do. Jesus said "You shall" instead of "You shall not." His commandments do not negate the ten commandments, but instead emphasize what God wants us to do.

Though the New Testament records some 40 commands from Jesus, only these three are called commandments.

I. HIS FIRST COMMANDMENT IS TO LOVE THE LORD:

It was Tuesday morning of Jesus' last week. He was in the court of the temple, and many of His enemies assaulted Him with arguments trying to entrap Him. The Sanhedrin asked of His authority, the Herodians asked about taxes, and the Sadducees asked about life after death. His response so astonished them that they hesitated to ask more questions.

However one scribe did, he asked Jesus "Which is the first commandment of all?" (Mark 12:28). And Jesus answered, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment." (Mark 12:29-30).

This was nothing new, for it was part of the Shema that Jewish fathers were required to say every day and tell their children every night, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

"With all your heart" means with sincerity, "with all your soul" with feeling, "with all your mind" with intellect, and "with all your strength" with intensity. God wants us to love Him with ALL our being, every single moment of every single day with every single facet of our lives.

That's not easy, as Peter learned.

Following His resurrection Jesus spoke to Peter on the shore of Galilee, asking "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" Peter replied, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love You." Jesus said to Him a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me." And Peter replied, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love You." And Jesus said to him a third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" And "Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love Me?' And he said to Him, 'Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.'" (John 21:15-17).

Most people assume that Jesus asked for Peter's love three times because on the day of Jesus' crucifixion, Peter denied Jesus three times.

But much more is meant, and it is about the Greek words for love. The New Testament was written in Greek, which has three words for love.

The first word is EROS and it is not used in the New Testament. Eros love is a self serving love, a sensual love that just wants to get something, and hence eroticism is sexual immorality.

A second word is PHILOS and it is used of a shared love, where you love someone or something and you also get something in return. So today we have such words as philosophy, philanthropy, philatelist, and even Philadelphia. PHILOS love is a good love because it is sharing, it gives and receives.

A third word is AGAPE and it is a sacrificial love, a love that always gives itself, not seeking a return, as John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son....."

When Jesus talked to Peter He asked if Peter AGAPED Him, and Peter replied that he loved him with PHILOS love. Jesus repeated the question and Peter replied the same. Then Jesus changed His question and asked Peter if he loved Him with PHILOS love. That grieved Peter and he replied, "Lord, You know all things. You know that I PHILOS you."

I've searched Peter's statements and writings in Scripture and as far as I've found he never said or wrote that he loved Jesus with AGAPE love. However, sometimes our lives tell more than our words. According to the apocryphal Acts of Peter, Peter fled from persecution in Rome at the hands of Nero's government, and along the road outside the city, he met the risen Jesus. In Latin, Peter asks Jesus, "Quō vādis?" He replied, "I am going to Rome to be crucified again". Peter then gains the courage to return to the city, where he is martyred by being crucified upside-down. What Peter did not say with his lips or his pen, he did with his life, he loved the Lord with AGAPE love.

II. JESUS' SECOND COMMANDMENT IS TO LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF:

Jesus went on to say, "And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love (agape) your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these'" (Mark 12:31).

Here Jesus quoted Leviticus 19:18 which says, "you shall love your neighbor as yourself." He then added, "I say to you, love "AGAPE" your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you that you may be sons of your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:43-46).

Our neighbor is not just the one living next door or across the street, or across the country or across the seas, it is anyone and everyone we meet and know, even our enemies.

What a different world this would be if we obeyed this second commandment, if we related to people out of love instead of out of jealousy, greed, resentment or indifference. To follow this commandment would truly change our world, yet it is a difficult commandment, easy to say but hard to obey.

I like what America and our allies did after World War 2, when we helped restore the people and countries of Germany and Japan, so that former enemies became some of our best friends.

III. THE THIRD COMMANDMENT IS TO LOVE OTHER CHRISTIANS AS CHRIST LOVED US:

When Jesus was in the upper room eating the Passover with His disciples, just hours before His arrest and death, He said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have AGAPE love for one another." (John 13:34-35). Within an hour He repeated this new commandment (15:12).

This commandment is truly new, never before had the Lord given this command and it has been so often ignored by Christians.

There are two special features of this New Commandment.

WHO WE ARE TO LOVE, AND HOW ARE WE TO LOVE:

This is not simply about loving neighbors but loving Christians. John knew this and wrote "This is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment" (1 John 3:23).

The relationships Christians share in the body of Christ often stir different emotions and attitudes which frequently disobey this command. We often irritate, resent, criticize or simply ignore one another. Paul said to the church Galatia, "you bite and devour one another" (5:15) - you don't. Want to go there for a church dinner - you'd be the dinner!

Look at the divisions in Christendom today, the various Orthodox Churches of eastern Europe, Roman Catholicism, and more than 400 Protestant denominations and many more independents.

When vacationing in mid Pennsylvania one year we went on Saturday to find a church to attend on Sunday and found a little church on a narrow road, it was the First Baptist Church. Across the narrow street was another little church, and its name was, The Second First Baptist Church. Wow! We found another community.

He said "love one another; as I have loved you" (John 13:34). It is not just "as you love yourself," but "as Jesus loves us."

It's one thing to love others the way we love ourselves, difficult as that may be, but infinitely more difficult to love others as Jesus does, with agape love. The standard now is not self-love, but Savior-love, not as you love yourself but as Christ loves us, with agape love. As Paul wrote, "Walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:2).

A bumper sticker reads: "Perform an unnatural act - love somebody."

Admittedly the standard is high, but Jesus wouldn't command us to do something we shouldn't or couldn't do. God sent us into a world filled with heartaches, broken pieces and sorrow, and He asks us to get up off our seats and start doing something with our hearts.

In the late 2nd century Tertullian was a Christian from North Africa who became the first great Latin theologian. To him we owe the oft-quoted line, "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." He described how pagans visited churches back then and commented, "Behold how they love one another... how they are ready to die for each other." It's not enough for a church to be friendly, but members of the church are asked to love one another, with agape love.

A Sunday school teacher asked her students how they felt about attending church. They responded in the usual ways: some boys said something silly to get the class to laugh, while others tried to be more serious. One girl was new to the class and never raised her hand or spoke up, but now she did and what she said was unforgettable. She said that going to church was, "like walking into the heart of God."

I like that! That's how it ought to be, loving other Christians as Jesus loves us.

ILL. Jason Upton is a prominent singer and song writer over these last thirty years. He wrote.....

"We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord.

We are one in the Spirit. We are one in the Lord.

And we pray that all unity may one day be restored.

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love.

Yes, they'll know we are Christians By our love."

