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DEVOTIONAL

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*Text – ‘A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.
John 13:34 – 35.*

A NEW COMMANDMENT

Scripture Reading – John 13:31-38.

Introduction

In this passage of scripture, Jesus begins His farewell to His disciples. Jesus is now with His close followers and proceeds to give them His final instructions. It is clear that He knew the end was near, but His face was now set as a flint towards Jerusalem and a Roman Cross. In a little while He would be separated from His disciples and would be humiliated before men as He was nailed to that cross. In these last few days before He would be taken into captivity, He wanted to leave them with the essence of His teaching, stress importance of His mission and the lay before them their responsibility and challenge to carry out that mission. These were the men who would be responsible to take the Gospel to the far reaches of the world. Jesus wanted to make sure that they understood what His priorities were in the building and establishing of His church. These priorities were non-negotiable principles to which they were to commit themselves if the gospel was to reach the world.

Furthermore, in this chapter He challenges them with a “A New Command.” His words are vital and the truth they were to proclaim was indispensable in the

life and mission of the church. This truth emphasizes the absolute necessity of a God-like love in the fellowship, witness and mission of the Body of Christ in the world. **Jesus said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:34 -35 .**

It is important that we place these words in the context of what just happened. Jesus had taken a basin of water and washed His disciple's feet. At first Peter refused to allow Jesus to do this, but Jesus said to him "Unless I wash you, you will have no part with me. And Peter replied "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well." There is a suggestive symbolism in this act of feet washing, and certainly there is a message in the words of Jesus to Peter. If you don't let me wash you Peter you can no have part in me. There is suggestion of a deeper heart cleansing and a washing away of our sins found in the atoning work of Jesus on the Cross. If we refuse that atonement we can have no part in Christ. As we move from here, we discover that Jesus predicts His betrayal and Judas is revealed as the one who would betray Him and leaves to go out into the night. Then we hear Jesus saying, "A New command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." John speaks about this love throughout his book and no less than 25 times in his letters. John who has been called the "Apostle of love" is deeply concerned that Christ followers understand the indispensability of love in their relationship with Christ and its priority in the life of the church and its witness in the world.

The Gospel of John has been given many different titles by bible scholars, but the most fitting is that it has become known as the Gospel of God's love. (Boice) It has been called "God's love letter to the world." This is easy to understand because John 3:16 and the verses on which our message is based, could be considered the heartbeat of his Gospel. As Montgomery Boice says so well "they are those passages in which the Lord Jesus Christ speaks to his disciples out of his great love for them, reminding them of that love and encouraging to them to love one another."

But Jesus lifts the idea of love to a higher level when He says to them **"As I have loved you, so you must love one another."** Jesus said to his disciples "A new command, I give you: Love one another." Gary Burge explains what Jesus means when talks about the new commandment. He writes "That the disciples are to love one another is nothing new," as you will discover in Leviticus 19:18. But that they are to love one another with the sort of love modeled by Jesus is something dramatic. It is love on a different level. This love characterizes Jesus' relationship with God as you will read in John14:31 and it is love that characterizes God's relationship with Jesus as you see in John3:35; 15:9-10. But the love of Jesus is supremely manifested in His obedience to His Father's will. "The world must learn", He said, "that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me," John14:31. One has pointed out that this tells us that "the disciples of Jesus are to reflect the sort of love known to Jesus – a love expressed through committed obedience." The words "As I have loved you" points to Jesus' most recent act of love (the foot washing) and but also to ultimately highlight His sacrifice on the Cross, and it means that to truly love another, we must pursue a life of servant hood and sacrifice. This in essence is **the "New Commandment." A new level of love. "A New Command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."** It is important to address the basic elements or ingredients in this new command? You will note that this command emphasizes,

1. THE PRIORITY OF CHRISTIAN LOVE. John 13:34-35.

Love is a priority because it is

a. A Directive to love as a dynamic quality of a Christ-like lifestyle. John 13:34. It is His command. John 13:34. "A new command I give you: Love one another....." This command is not option with Jesus. It is clear that He wants

us to settle this issue first, for it is where we begin in the Christian faith and in our mission in the world. Yet it seems that it is where we have failed the most.

Now if we move from these verses in chapter 13 to chapter 14, Jesus speaks frequently of our need to love Him and each other.. In chapter 15 we read again, "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." John 15:12. Why this constant repetition? It is because this love is a priority with Him. John seems to follow the same pattern in his letters. As Boice points out "he repeats the command in his first letter to the churches of Asia. 'Love one another," in 1 John 4:7 and four verses later again, 'Love one another" 1 John 4:11, and then the third time, 'Love one another '1John 4:12. It is clear that there is an urgency in the Apostles mind about this priority. And the Apostle Paul in the 13th chapter in his First letter to the Corinthian church makes clear why. **Verse 1-3. "If I speak with the tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging symbol. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames but have not love, I gain nothing."** It is easy to see why love is a priority in the Christian life. This is more than a sentimental poem to grace a wedding ritual. It is a fundamental and indispensable priority in Christian discipleship. Jesus makes quite clear that Love is to be a priority in our Christian lifestyle. Note that it will involve,

b. A Decision of Obedience to the Command of Jesus. John 13:34. "A new command I give you: Love one another." Immediately a command is given **obedience is implied.** We generally do not think of love as a command to be obeyed. We tend to think of it as a spontaneous response to an intense feeling or emotion in the heart. But a command implies obedience and obedience necessitates a decision. One has written, "There is not much difference lexically between Agapeo (A God-like love) and Phileo(a friendship love or brotherly love).

Both involve voluntary(I decided to love you) and involuntary(I can't help but love you). But they are different on one point. There is no command to love in scripture that ever uses the word Phileo(friendship or brotherly love). A God-like, however, love is commanded. A selfless self-giving love is a directive. The word for love here in the Greek comes from the word agape which seems as James Packer has written, to have been a virtually Christian invention – a new word for a new thing(apart from about twenty occurrences in the Greek version of the Old Testament), it is almost non-existent before the New Testament. Agape draws its meaning directly from the revelation of God in Christ. It is revealed in Jesus. It is not a type or form of natural affection or love no matter how intense or deep. Human love does not reach the heights of agape love. Agape is a supernatural fruit of the Spirit.(Galatians 5:22.). It includes a matter of the decision of the will rather than feeling(for Christians must love even those they dislike – Matthew 5:44-48). Agape is totally self-less and characteristically God-like. It is the heartbeat of Christ-likeness and the essence of holiness. Human love is many times selfish and opportunistic. A young lady wrote a letter to her ex fiancé. Dearest Jimmy, No words could ever express the great unhappiness I've felt since breaking our engagement. Please say that you will take me back. No one could ever take your place in my heart, so please forgive me. I love you, I love you, I love you! Yours forever, Marie! P.S. And congratulations on winning the state lottery. That is opportunistic love. Paul wrote that agape is not self seeking. 1 Corinthians 13:5. It is selfless. It deliberately makes a choice to be selfless and God centered. This love is a priority with Jesus because it is His command and obedience to it is vital.

Secondly note,

2. THE PATTERN OF CHRISTIAN LOVE. John13:34-35.

Jesus said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. The key words here are "Love one another. As I have loved you" The pattern or example of the love

of Jesus lies in three areas. Firstly note,

a. The Character of Divine Love or the nature of Christ's love. It is Divine love. John 13:34. "Love one another as I have loved you." This is not love that can be found in our world apart from God Himself. John wrote in His epistle, "Let us love one another, for love comes from God." It comes from God because God is love. John wrote in his first letter 4:8. "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. And again in 1 John 4:16 "God is love, whoever lives in love, lives in God and God in him." This God is holy in essence. This is who God is! God is transparently pure. In Him there is no stain of sin, for He is Light and in Him there is no darkness at all. The scriptures are clear on that truth. But God is also love and therefore it is not a carnal, fleshly or human love with its limitations and self-centeredness. The love that comes from Him is essentially and inseparably tied together with His holiness. Because Holy is who He is, it follows that His love is on a different level to that of the world. It is a holy love devoid of the mark of sin on it. It is pure, selfless love. This is the character of the Christ's love. Richard Halverson wrote **"that there is nothing you can do to make God love you more! There is nothing you can do to make God love you less! His love is Unconditional, Impartial, Everlasting, Infinite, Perfect."** This describes the character or the nature of His love. Secondly Christ's love is a pattern because of

b. Its Concern. John 13:34. This is revealed in five significant words. "As I have loved YOU." The emphasis is in the personal pronoun YOU. In chapter 12 He tells them that He is about to give Himself on a Cross for them. In chapter 12 verse 23 He says, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified." The hour refers to the hour of His crucifixion. In this passage of scripture Jesus says "Now is the Son of Man glorified..." Part of the glorification Jesus is His death on the Cross...." In this way, Jesus is the supreme and ultimate example of love towards others. His sacrificial love is always reaching out to others. John tells

us chapter 3:16 that "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son....." "He came to seek and to save that which was lost." He came to call sinners to repentance. The ultimate consequence of this kind of love is that it compelled Him to go a cross and kept Him there. Such was the concern of His unconditional love for you and me.

During the 17th century, Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector of England, sentenced a soldier to be shot for his crimes. The execution was to take place at the ringing of the evening curfew bell. However the bell did not sound. The soldier's fiancé had climbed to the belfry and clung to the great clapper of the bell to prevent it from striking. When she was summoned by Cromwell to account for her actions, she wept as she showed her bruised and bleeding hands. Cromwell's heart was touched and he said, "Your lover shall live because of your sacrifice. Curfew shall not ring tonight." The love of this woman concerned only for the life of her fiancé, was willing to sacrifice herself. The intense concern of God's for this world finds its clearest expression and example on an old rugged cross, where the Lamb of God hung between and heaven and earth bruised beaten and bleeding. There is no greater revelation of His concern fore us than this. You shall live because of His loving sacrifice. Thirdly Christ's love is an example because of

c. Its Cost. John 13:34. This truth is contained in the words "as I have loved you." This statement encompasses and includes what Jesus did on the Cross for the world. This love knew no limits. This love did not count the cost as something to hinder His purpose for the redemption of the human race. Indeed it was the force and the inner compulsion to give Himself up for the redemption of mankind. In verse one of this chapter, John referring to Christ sacrifice writes, "Having loved His own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of His love." **The full extent of His love is His sacrifice on a Cross.** This sacrifice cost Him His life. John in his First Letter says, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us." 1 John 3:16. The supreme

and ultimate cost ever made in order to redeem a soul, is His death. Jesus came to minister to us and to give His life a ransom for many, but the kind of death that Jesus died was indescribable as well as incomprehensible. It is an unfathomable mystery that Jesus was willing to pay that kind of price for your soul and my soul. It caused Wesley to write **"Tis mystery all the immortal dies, who can explore this strange design"..... Amazing love how can it be, That thou my God should'st die for me?"** One cannot understand its DIVINE DESIGN or explain it. Neither can we answer this question except, in terms of the **love of God for us**. Even then we cannot plumb the depths of the price that was paid for us. Jesus said "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this that one lay down His life for His friends." Paying the supreme sacrifice reveals "the greater love."

We have heard a lot these days about "extreme makeover." The word extreme has almost become a buzz word in the television industry and in our world. But nothing is as extreme as the price that love paid for the salvation of the world. The love of God revealed at the Cross where Jesus died, is love pushing the limits of sacrifice to the ultimate extreme. And even the contemporary use of the word **"extreme"** fades into nothingness. The excruciating agonizing death of Jesus gives the word **extreme** a new meaning. Nothing can compare to the extreme that God went to redeem mankind. The story is told of a certain Medieval Monk who announced that the following Sunday evening he was going to preach a sermon on "The love of God." As the sun set and the shadows fell silently across the countryside and the light ceased to come through the cathedral windows and darkness enveloped the sanctuary. The congregation gathered, and was strangely silent as they waited to hear the message. In the darkness of the altar, the monk lighted a candle and carried it to the crucifix. First of all, he illumined the crown of thorns, then, next he pointed the candle at the two wounded hands and waited a moment. The lighted candle was then focused on the feet and after which he moved toward the mark of spear wound in the Saviors side. A hush came over the people. The monk blew out the candle

and left the chancel. There was nothing else to say. Everything had been said that needed to be said. Indeed when you look at the crucified Christ, the message that comes through is that God loves us with a redeeming love. He loves us to the extreme. The scars in His body speak eloquently of the price that love paid to save us from sin and hell. Cost, sacrifice and love go together. This is the pattern of Divine love. Jesus moves on to emphasize,

3. THE PORTRAYAL OF CHRISTIAN LOVE. John 13:34-35.

"As I have loved you, so you must love one another.....By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." There are two things to be said at this point. First

a. Love is the Divine Expectation for His follower. John 13:35. In these words **Jesus does not leave any loopholes for an option.** Love is Christ's expectation of His disciples. "As I have loved you, so you must love one another." In the mission of the church to take the gospel to all men, love is an imperative. It is the mark or the characteristic by which we are to be known as the followers of Jesus Christ. Remove that quality and you simply are left with a religious organization going through the motions. This is why love is not an option. The Apostle Paul writing to the Church at Corinth was wrestling and grappling with some serious issues that had invaded the church, where there was (in part,) spiritual arrogance about the gifts they possessed. There were divisions as they collected in cliques. They had decided to follow certain men in the church. Some said "I follow Paul," and another said, "I follow Apollos;" another, "I follow Cephas" or Peter, still another "I follow Christ." This led to deep divisions in the church. And Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 presents love as the answer to all the divisions and serious problems among the believers. Love, he says, is the antidote to hurt, strife and schisms. It is the healing power which will cure the envy of the gifts of fellow Christians, selfishness, and impatience with one another in public meetings resulting in conduct that was disgracing the Lord

Jesus Christ. "Love," he said, "is the most excellent way" 1 Corinthians 12:30.. It is the indispensable quality of Grace needed by Christ's followers. "We can speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but without love we are only a resounding gong and a clanging symbol. I can have the gift of prophecy and fathom all mysteries and knowledge but if there is no love it is a futile exercise. I may have the kind of faith that can remove mountains, but if I have no love I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing."(see 1 Corinthians 13:1ff.

One has said that "Paul's thesis is that the absence of love disqualifies the gifts. He does not say we would get on better if we had love, rather he insists that we cannot get on at all without it. Love is not merely an adjunct to the Christian life and service, it is indispensable for is the heart of it. It is the life blood of the soul." Paul is not saying that the gifts of the Spirit are not important; what he is saying is saying is that Christian love is of top priority and is indispensable to Christian life and service." Jesus made it clear; "As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." All men will not know that we are the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ by our gifts, our talents, our intellectual abilities or our charismatic personalities. They will know that we are His followers if we love one another. Furthermore,

b. Love is the Dynamic Expression of the Spirit of Christ through us. John 13:34-35. "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." The key words in this verse "men will know that you are my disciples...." Love for each other is testimony of our commitment to Christ. Love is the expression the Spirit of Jesus in His followers. When there is love for each other in the Body of Christ, it authenticates the gospel and brings glory to God. It tells the world that this thing called the gospel is real and genuine. Bruce Milne Wrote that this "loving community or church is one which welcomes all people, irrespective of background, age, gender, ethnic group ,skin color, moral history,

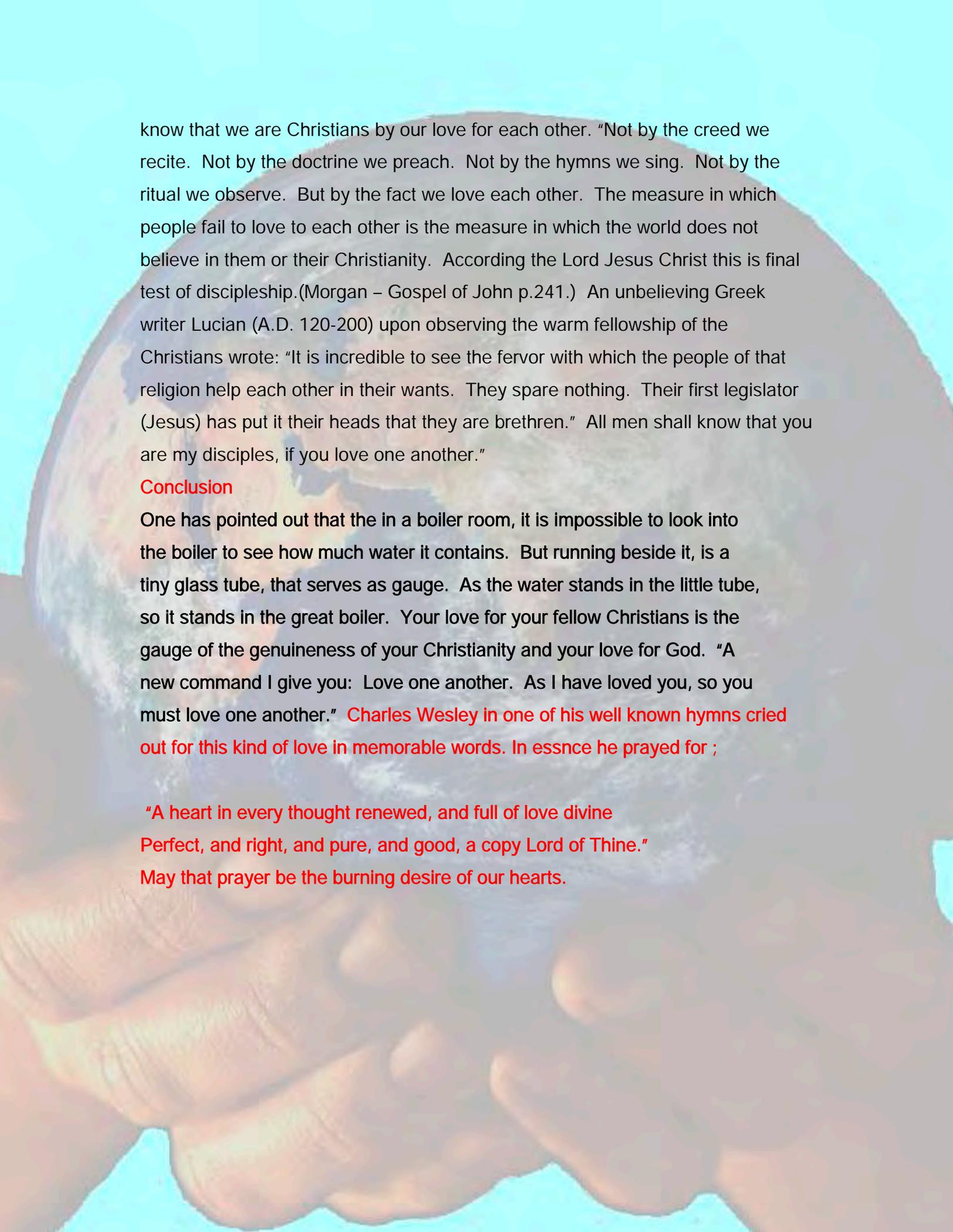
social status, influence, intelligence, religious background or lack of it. **To love like Jesus is to love inclusively, indiscriminately and universally.** When that kind of love flows within the Body of Christ, the world will take note that they have been with Jesus." We need not be afraid of this standard of love. Tertullian reported in the late second century, the comment of the pagans in his day: **'Behold, how these Christians love each other! How ready they are to die for each other.'** This expression of the love of Christ was a drawing power to the multitudes. A lack of love which gives rise to carnal attitudes will drive away the world from Christ. Down through the years serious damage has been done by those who indulge in the sins of the spirit. It was Dr. E.S. Jones who rightly said that "more damage has been done by bad tempered Christians than by drunkards,." and certainly by critical, gossiping and complaining lips than by thieves and robbers. Jesus in John 17 prayed for unity in the church. This prayer was repeated no less that four times. He prays that they maybe one.(see verses 11,21,22,23) It was a unity based on love. "I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the LOVE YOU HAVE FOR ME MAY BE IN THEM and that I myself may be in them." This love is tied together with his concern for unity among His followers.. You cannot have true unity without Divine love. The importance of this truth lies in fact that authentic unity has three basic results. The prayer of Jesus prayer makes this clear in John17:20-21 and 23. If there is unity based on love,

i. The World will BELIEVE in the message of a unified church. John 17:20

ii. The world will BELIEVE that Jesus came from God the Father. John 17:21.

iii. The World would KNOW that Jesus came from the Father. John17:23.

This is what happens when love is the heartbeat of the church. Men will not simply believe that we are Christ's disciples they will know it. This quality of grace gives credibility power and authority to our witness in the world. The world will



know that we are Christians by our love for each other. "Not by the creed we recite. Not by the doctrine we preach. Not by the hymns we sing. Not by the ritual we observe. But by the fact we love each other. The measure in which people fail to love to each other is the measure in which the world does not believe in them or their Christianity. According the Lord Jesus Christ this is final test of discipleship.(Morgan – Gospel of John p.241.) An unbelieving Greek writer Lucian (A.D. 120-200) upon observing the warm fellowship of the Christians wrote: "It is incredible to see the fervor with which the people of that religion help each other in their wants. They spare nothing. Their first legislator (Jesus) has put it their heads that they are brethren." All men shall know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Conclusion

One has pointed out that the in a boiler room, it is impossible to look into the boiler to see how much water it contains. But running beside it, is a tiny glass tube, that serves as gauge. As the water stands in the little tube, so it stands in the great boiler. Your love for your fellow Christians is the gauge of the genuineness of your Christianity and your love for God. "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." **Charles Wesley in one of his well known hymns cried out for this kind of love in memorable words. In essence he prayed for ;**

**"A heart in every thought renewed, and full of love divine
Perfect, and right, and pure, and good, a copy Lord of Thine."
May that prayer be the burning desire of our hearts.**