

The New Commandment

"With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer"—Luke 22:15.

On the night that Jesus was betrayed, we find him with his 12 disciples seated at a table in a large upper room in Jerusalem. He had met with them to keep the feast of the Passover—instituted on the night that God put forth His mighty hand and slew all the firstborn in Egypt.

Doubtless Jesus and his disciples had met on previous occasions, but at this time there was a special solemnity. Although the Passover had been observed by Israel down through the centuries, there was especial significance attached to it at this particular time. And Jesus, the Man of Sorrows, was the center of that assembly.

"And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the 12 with him."

Jesus was eating the Passover with his disciples to show them that he was one with them in all their trials and troubles and hardships, from which his own blood—the blood of the antitypical Passover—would set them free. The time was nigh when he was to be offered up. He was almost ready to give up his life, that all who were his faithful followers might have life eternal. What a wondrous example of love, for—

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends . . . Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (John 15:13-14).

While he and his disciples were still around the table, Jesus gave unto them a new commandment—a commandment that embraces all others—

ye "A new commandment I give unto you—that ye love one another. As I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34-5).

It will be to our profit to consider for a brief period some of the things that come under the heading of love. The word occurs many times in the Scriptures, and is of great significance in the purpose of God, and the relationship of God with man, and the relationship of men with one another.

Divine love must have implicit trust, devotion without thought of itself, and an ever ready desire to make a full surrender to the will of God; it can be noted in a person by their Christlike character. Spiritual love is the highest spiritual quality, and very different from the worldly, selfish, so-called "love" that seeks self-gratification.

In 1 Cor. 13, Paul gives his definition in these words—

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. Though I have faith so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing . . . Now abideth faith, hope, and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

The apostles lay great emphasis on spiritual love, as:

"Love worketh no ill to his neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:10).
"Above all, have fervent love among yourselves" (1 Pet. 4:8).

If we are obedient to the wonderful attribute of Divine love, then we keep all the old commandments in the full depths of their spirit. By exercising Divine love we fulfil the whole law.

There is no mystery as to how the principle works. If we take the command, "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me," we see that such a command is quite unnecessary to the person who truly loves God. Nor do we have to tell him to "Take not the Name of God in vain." No man, if he loves God, would ever think of taking His Name in vain.

Would a person filled with pure, Divine affection ever need to be instructed: "Honor thy father and thy mother"? Such things follow naturally upon a true love and reverence for God. Could a man imbued with Divine love *steal*?—or bear false witness?—or enviously covet the things of others? It is unthinkable. So we see how much meaning there is in Paul's statement:

"Love is the fulfilling of the Law."

Could we apply any better or surer measuring line to our lives? We know from our study of God's Word that it is useless and hopeless for us to sit back and say to ourselves: "*How can I follow such a difficult example as that which Christ has given us? How can there be any ray of hope for us that we come up to that standard?*"

Of course it is not an easy task. Nothing really worthwhile is ever easy. And this is the only thing that is truly worthwhile and worth the effort. Without God's help it is impossible. Jesus says this in Matt. 19, in answer to the disciples' despairing exclamation: "*Who then can be saved?*" It was on the occasion of the rich young ruler's question—

"Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?"
Jesus reproved him for calling him "good," saying—

"There is none good but one, that is God; but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments."

And the young man said that he had kept all the commandments from his youth up—what could he lack? It would appear that he lacked many things. Like the multitudes of that day, and of our day, that young man had read the commandments without understanding, or he would not have so confidently asserted his obedience to all the commandments. Jesus showed him the spirit of Divine love the commandments were to teach:

"If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me."

We remember how Jesus described the love generated by the Gospel of the Kingdom in the true heart—as treasure in a field, as a pearl of great price, for the joy of which the finder "*selleth all that he hath.*"

But the young man was greatly grieved at that saying, and went away sorrowful! In his pride of life he would like to obtain the Pearl of Great Price, but the lust of the eye and the lust of the flesh were too strong for him to give up the temporal things of the world; its pleasures and treasures were too much to give up for eternal life in the Kingdom of God. Jesus recognized the plight of the young man, for he said to his disciples, as he watched him depart—

"A rich man shall hardly enter into the Kingdom of Heaven . . . It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God."

If that young man thought he knew, and had kept, the commandments from his youth up, then he could not have listened with understanding to the wonderful words uttered by Jesus on the mount, which began—

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

Had the young man understood the commandments, then he would have understood the words of Jesus when he said—

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Had he understood the commandments, he would have understood the words of Jesus when he said—

"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

No, it is not easy to attain anything of value. Did Paul find it easy after he had been stricken on the way to Damascus, and had acknowledged Jesus as Lord and Master? When the Truth of the Gospel was revealed to him by Jesus, all the hatred and resentment he had had left him, and he gave first place in his life to Christ, and his great new commandment of love.

All acknowledge that Paul was one of the most outstanding examples of faith recorded in Scripture. Is it supposed to be any easier for us today to practice fervently faith in the Gospel? True, we may not be committed to stripes, or condemned to chains and bonds. Nevertheless, if we are not continually on our guard, we can find ourselves in bondage to some worldly things that can chain us as securely to evil as Paul was chained for his obedience to the Gospel which he received from Christ by revelation.

There are different kinds of bondage, although we may not be able to perceive them in ourselves. We say such a one is given to gossip, and such a one to misrepresentation; another may be rude and contentious, or hasty of temper, or sharp of tongue; another may be envious of the things of his neighbor, or have his heart and interests in worldly things, or be a slave to worldly habits.

These are all evils, and contrary to the Truth, and *everyone that is addicted to evil in any form is in bondage*. Paul makes it very clear when he said—

"For I know that in me—that is, in my flesh—dwelleth no good thing; for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not" (Rom. 7:18).

We, as Paul, may delight in the law of God after the inward man. But there is another law in our members warring against the law of our mind and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin which is in our members. But if our hopes are to be realized of participating in the glorious things of the future age, it is very necessary that we build on a sure foundation. *And what better foundation can there be than the love of God* being established on the earth. Paul says—

But "For we are all laborers together with God; ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon" (1 Cor. 3:9).

Much is said in the world about brotherhood and love, but can you find it? Preachers of every kind are crying to the people to foster those qualities of life and character, that men and nations may live together in peace and harmony. How much more is it incumbent upon Christadelphians—the brethren of Christ—to manifest those qualities in superlative degree among themselves, and to others!

"For if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:11-14).

Keep ever in our minds the words of the Master—

"If ye love me, KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS."

And Paul says—

"The greatest of these is Love."

And if we agree with Paul—if we really believe that love of God, and love of Christ, and love toward others, is the greatest attribute we can possess—the most valuable and desirable and joyful thing we can acquire—then let us ask ourselves: "Do we possess it? Does it control all our actions? *If not, why not?*"

Surely we should make it the first principle governing our lives—the first thing in our mind in the morning and the last thing at night. We dare not be content until we can truly say that the commandments of Christ and the love of God thoroughly rule our lives from day to day and moment to moment.

What are the wonderful characteristics to which Paul gives so much attention? In 1 Cor. 13, Paul lists in unmistakable language the various elements that make up that quality of which we all stand so much in need—that one vital thing we should "sell all to possess."

Paul says that though he had the ability to understand all mystery, though he had faith to move mountains, if he had not love he was "nothing." In the verses following, the quality of love reflects the characteristics of Jesus Christ, who—of all men—manifested to the world the spirit and nature of true love.

"*Love suffereth long.*" Patience is the virtue of enduring and waiting, not always of necessity when there is no other choice, but by a determined will for a godly reason. We should not feel that adversity has come upon us because God has withdrawn His love from us. Chastisement is many times proof of the presence of Divine love—

"For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth"
(Heb. 12:6).

Then Paul says: "*Love is kind.*" This quality of kindness will lead people to "do unto others as they would wish to be done by." Consider our heavenly Father's love for His children,

"His merciful kindness is great toward us."

"*Love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.*" Here is the humility Jesus exemplified throughout his life.

"*Love seeketh not her own.*" Here we have the unselfishness of Jesus. And Paul exhorts us—

"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind each esteem other better than themselves."

"*Love is not easily provoked.*" A calm, even disposition, not easily upset or angered—that is worth striving for. What a comfort and strength is such a one! Jesus admonishes us that anger is evil, and unbecoming to all who are making an earnest effort to be worthy of eternal life in the Kingdom.

"*Love rejoiceth in the Truth.*" Here is the element of sincerity, guilelessness, and consistent, joyful earnestness in the things of the Truth, stressed by Paul in his epistle to Titus—

"In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity . . .

"A lover of good men; sober, just, holy, temperate."

These are the elements that make up the quality of love. We have all read them many times, but they never lose their interest and charm to those who search the Scriptures daily; and they are always worthy of our attention and discussion. Within them lie the issues of life and death. All else is passing, but these things are eternal.

We bring them again to our attention this morning, that our minds may be centered upon them for a few moments—that our minds may be refreshed, that we may assess ourselves anew and intensify our determination to incorporate them into our lives.

This is our most pressing task in life. We fail, and fail, but we must try again, seeking in faith the power that comes from above. There is no use "beholding our face in a glass" and then passing on and forgetting—diverted from our great task by the absorption of the present. We *must* be among the very, very few of all ages who have made this the beautiful pattern of their lives.

We must all agree with the Divine verdict—that love is the greatest attribute we can possess, the highest goal, the supreme accomplishment of life. All else is failure; here alone is achievement and success.

That true, spiritual love is indeed the "bond of perfectness"—the "beauty of holiness." If we can truly possess it, then the peace of God will rule in our hearts and guide our daily behavior toward our fellowmen.

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We return to that large upper room where Jesus and his disciples are eating the last supper. Here Jesus appoints another ordinance—one by which his death, burial, and resurrection would be kept before the minds of believers "*until he come.*"

The meaning of these things was at the time very uncertain to the disciples, but the events of the following day must have brought very vividly to their minds what Christ had been preparing them for.

By submitting to the death of the cross, with all its shame and cruelty, Christ fulfilled the plan and purpose of the Father—to condemn sin in the flesh—for he bore the sinful nature of Adam, yet he was holy and undefiled. Thus he opened a way of salvation to whosoever will be obedient to his commandments. He was the "one Name given under heaven whereby we must be saved." All this was indicated by the words—

"This is my body broken for you."

By being baptized into his Name, we can approach God and His throne of grace through the mediator Christ Jesus, confessing our sins, and humbly asking forgiveness. And the same lesson can be seen when he took the cup after partaking of the bread, for we read—

"After the same manner also he took the cup, saying, This is my blood of the New Covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins . . . this do ye, in remembrance of me."

We all know what this New Testament or Covenant is. But the words "*New Covenant*" carry an allusion to an Old Covenant, which was given to Israel by God through His servant Moses at Mount Sinai, for the Lord called unto Moses, saying—

"Now, therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My Covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine" (Exo. 19:5).

"And Moses took the Book of the Covenant, and read it in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the Lord hath said we will do, and be obedient" (Exo. 24:7).

That covenant carried severe punishments for any who did not observe its obligations. It was so rigid that Peter said it was:

"A yoke which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear."

Jesus Christ was the only man that could render perfect obedience: though he was tried in all points like as we are, yet he was without sin.

The Old Covenant, which had been established about 1450 years earlier, was now replaced by the New Covenant—brought into force by the complete obedience of Jesus Christ unto death. Jesus triumphed over death and the grave, and the New Covenant was established and offered, and, Paul says—

"It was established upon better promises."

Those promises we know as the "promises given unto the fathers." They are the promises of future blessedness unto Abraham and his seed forever.

The New Covenant was an agreement that, if we will believe the Word of God and have faith in Him, He will perform all that He has promised and established in Jesus. We, who have been baptized into his Name, and have put on Christ, are no longer aliens, but members of the "commonwealth of Israel," and will, if faithful, inherit the blessings promised to Abraham.

But why was all this accomplished through the shed blood of Christ?—

"For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar, to make an atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that maketh atonement for the soul."

Blood represents life. Under the Mosaic Law the sacrifice of an animal by shedding its blood was the acceptable approach to God. But it was not *in itself* a means of forgiveness for sins, for we read in Heb. 10:4—

"For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin . . .

"Then said I, Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God . . .

"He taketh away the first (covenant), that he may establish the second . . . By which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all... By one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified."

Brethren and sisters, let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, "*For He is faithful that promised.*"

We assemble ourselves together on the first day of the week to show forth our allegiance to Jesus Christ by the observance of the memorial supper. And as we meet around the table of remembrance each week, may we understand and appreciate to the fullest extent that fervent love Christ had for us—

"Greater love hath no man than this—that a man lay down his life for his friends."

May we be worthy of such love, and show *our* love by being obedient to his commandments, for—

"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me; and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."

With the knowledge we have, we have every incentive to live earnestly, and to remember and obey the commandments which the Lord has given us for the guidance of his House while he is on a far journey. We look forward to that day of glorious cleansing, when we shall be delivered from our

sinful nature and made to stand in the "*robe of righteousness*," pure and white, in the glory of incorruptibility, and join in joyful praise:

"Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father."

May God grant us the help of His countenance in all our endeavors to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Prince of Peace, for the day draws near when he shall stand upon the earth with all the holy angels.

—C.H.T.