



Love Revolution

REDISCOVERING THE
NEW COVENANT LOVE OF JESUS

Abridged Edition

GAYLORD ENNS

LOVE REVOLUTION

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*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another;
as I have loved you, that you also love one another.*

John 13:34

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INTRODUCTION



In the last book of the Old Testament the prophet Malachi wrote, *For I am the LORD, I do not change* (Malachi 3:6).

Love Revolution is rooted in the God who does not change. The truth at the heart of this book will never change. It will never change because it is founded in the nature of God who said, *I do not change*.

But, how we understand God's truth will change. And our understanding of that truth will change us.

This book is about coming back to the One who will never change. It is about coming to the feet of Jesus and seeing the truth of His One Command.

CHAPTER 1



DAYS OF DARKNESS

October 21, 2001 started like any other Sunday. As a pastor I liked to spend time alone early Sunday morning. It gave me time to focus my mind and heart for a busy day. This had been my habit since I had first become a pastor 34 years ago. So on that morning, I left the house at 5:30 and headed for the restaurant where I usually had breakfast and prepared for the day.

But I didn't end up there. Instead I drove my car down unfamiliar streets, past buildings I did not know and ended up at an eating place I had not been to before. As I sat alone at that unfamiliar place, I knew something wasn't working. Something was broken inside me. I knew I couldn't speak at two Sunday services that morning. I just couldn't. I needed help.

I called my son and told him, "I'm not doing well. I'm not making it. Could you preach for me this morning?"

Looking back, there had been warning signs. I had not slept well for months. I was beginning to stutter when I spoke. Decisions were getting harder and harder to make. I was under a doctor's care for depression.

After that morning, the leaders at my church released me from all church work. I stayed home and slept. Patti, my wife, became worried; I was sleeping morning, noon and night. I was tired—so very, very tired. I couldn't read. I didn't feel like watching TV. I lacked the focus and the energy.

After about six weeks, energy slowly began to return. I was starting to heal.

Then came another setback. Just as I was feeling better, I was diagnosed with colon cancer. In March doctors removed a foot and a half of my colon. Recovery from this major surgery took more time.

Between the emotional breakdown and the cancer, it was six months before I felt like myself again.

Questions:

1. Have you experienced a crisis in your life? (If you have not, think about someone who has.)
2. In what ways have you seen God bring good out of that crisis?

CHAPTER 2



A DAY OF DARKNESS

On May 1, 2002 I awakened with a very clear thought: “I’m ready to study the Bible!” For me there was great joy in that thought. I was a pastor with a teaching gift and enjoyed studying the Bible. But I hadn’t been able to do that for half a year.

Sitting down to study God’s Word, I had the feeling that I was sitting at a large empty table. Once that table had been filled with many things, but now those things were gone. In their place only one thing remained—my Bible.

I was ready to study God’s Word. But where would I start? Genesis? Psalms? One of the Gospels? The Bible was a big book. I needed a point of focus.

In that moment, the Great Commission came to mind. I opened my Bible to Matthew 28 and read Jesus’ words: *All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, **baptizing them** in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching them** to observe all things that I have commanded you* (Matthew 28:18-20).

I knew those words well. They were the reason I had become a pastor. But, this morning I saw the verses in a new way. I saw that the Great Commission contained Jesus’ own definition of discipleship. That definition had two parts (1) *baptizing them* and (2) *teaching them*.

The first part—*baptizing them*—was tied to faith in Jesus. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the cross for our sins, was buried and raised again on the third day. Believing in Him was the first step in discipleship. That led to baptism, a public declaration of one’s faith in Jesus. The second part—*teaching them*—involved helping the new believers to understand everything Jesus commanded His disciples to obey.

The two parts to discipleship had never seemed as simple to me as they did in that moment. I felt I had a good understanding of the first part of discipleship. During decades

of ministry, I had led many to faith in Jesus and baptized hundreds who professed that faith.

But the *teaching them* half captured my attention. A question formed in my mind: “What did Jesus mean when He said, *teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you*? What did Jesus command His disciples to obey?”

To answer this question, I selected the words *command* and *commandment* and looked up how they were used in the New Testament. My plan was to make a list of all that Jesus had commanded so I could teach that to others.

Although Jesus gave a few commands in specific situations, I found two primary uses of the words. The first use of the words *command* or *commandment* was as I expected. Nearly 40 times in the New Testament the words were used in reference to the Old Covenant Law—the Ten Commandments. For example, speaking in reference to the Old Covenant Law Jesus said, *You know the **commandments**: “Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and your mother”* (Mark 10:19).

But, the second primary way the words were used completely surprised me. More than 30 times in the New Testament, the words were used along with the word *love*. In verses like the following, I saw the clear connection between *command/commandment* and *love*:

*A new **commandment** I give to you, that you **love** one another; as I have **loved** you, that you also **love** one another* (John 13:34).

*If you **love** Me, keep My **commandments**. . . . He who has my **commandments** and keeps them, it is he who **loves** Me* (John 14:15, 21).

*If you keep My **commandments**, you will abide in My **love**, just as I have kept My Father’s **commandments** and abide in His **love**. . . . This is My **commandment**, that you **love** one another as I have **loved** you. . . . These things I **command** you, that you **love** one another* (John 15:10, 12, 17).

*And 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).

*And this **commandment** we have from Him: that he who **loves** God must **love** his brother also* (1 John 4:21).

*By this we know that we **love** the children of God, when we **love** God and keep*

*His **commandments**. For this is the **love** of God, that we keep His **commandments**. And His **commandments** are not burdensome* (1 John 5:2-3).

The relationship between the words *command/commandment* and the word *love* was striking.

Also of great importance, I saw that this relationship had its beginning in the *New Commandment* that Jesus gave His disciples. On the night before His crucifixion—on the night of the Last Supper—Jesus had given His disciples a *New Commandment*. He had said, *A **new commandment** I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another* (John 13:34).

In addition, Jesus did more than introduce it as a *New Commandment*. He took ownership of it calling it *My Commandment*. And He repeated it two more times before the night was over.

*This is **My commandment**, that you love one another as I have loved you* (John 15:12).

These things I command you, that you love one another (John 15:17).

For the first time I was seeing that Jesus had given only One Command: *Love one another, as I have loved you*. In the Great Commission, He had said, *teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you* to set apart, as very important, His One Command—the command He had given the disciples at the Last Supper.

In calling His followers to make disciples of all the nations, Jesus had pointed to His One Commandment—*love one another as I have loved you*. In fact, He had emphasized that their love for one another would be what marked them as disciples. *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 love for one another*** (John 13:34-35).

That morning I had asked myself: “What did Jesus command His disciples to obey?” The answer to that question had led me to find foundational truth that was missing from my understanding—Jesus’ Commandment. In fact I was more familiar with the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament than I was with the One Commandment in the New Testament.

How could this be? I had attended church all my life. I had been a pastor for 34 years. At one point I had even preached a year-long sermon series on love. Yet, I hadn’t clearly seen Jesus’ Command. How could I have missed something so clear and simple?

Questions:

1. What does the author share about Jesus' definition of making a disciple as written in the Great Commission?
2. Before reading this chapter, if asked "What is Jesus' command?" what would you have answered?

CHAPTER 3



TWO GREAT COMMANDMENTS

Over the next few weeks, I saw how Jesus' New Testament command—to love one another as He loved us—was connected with God's New Testament command—to believe in Jesus. Together, these two commands are the great commandments of the Christian faith. In his first letter John makes this clear. He says, *And this is His [God's] commandment: that we should [1] believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and [2] love one another, as He [Jesus] gave us commandment* (1 John 3:23).

God the Father commanded *that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ*. God's Son, Jesus, commanded that we *love one another* as He loves us.

Although the idea of two great commandments was new to me, it was clearly not new to the writers of the New Testament. They recognized the great importance of (1) faith in Jesus Christ and (2) love for one another. It seemed that they took these two expressions of grace as signs of a person's new life in Jesus Christ.

Consider the following verses from the letters: *We give thanks . . . praying always for you, since we heard of your **faith** in Christ Jesus and of your **love** for all the saints (Colossians 1:3-4). Therefore I also, after I heard of your **faith** in the Lord Jesus and your **love** for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers (Ephesians 1:15-16). For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but **faith** working through **love** (Galatians 5:6). Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of **faith** . . . And let us consider one another in order to stir up **love** and good works (Hebrews 10:22, 24).*

As I thought back to the Great Commission, I saw clearly that it also was of two parts—faith and love. *Baptizing them* related to faith. *Teaching them* related to love.

The first great commandment—that we believe in Jesus—has been taught as a foundational truth for the last 500 years of Christian history. That truth was restored to

the church in the 1500s largely through the teachings of Martin Luther. Luther taught that salvation comes by faith in Jesus, the Son of God, who died on the cross for our sins. He made it clear that salvation does not come from works of the law. Luther's understanding that *the just shall live by faith* (Romans 1:17) resulted in what is known as the Reformation.

I too understood the first of the two great commandments. I understood the importance of having faith in Jesus. But I had never before understood the second root commandment. In fact, I could not recall ever having heard mention of Jesus' Command.

And, tragically, I was not the only one who had missed it. As I came to see over months of searching, the second of the great commandments had been lost early on in church history and never recovered.

The writers of the New Testament had clearly seen Jesus' Commandment as foundational. The book of Acts shows us that the first believers loved one another deeply. But, the early church fathers—the leaders of the church who came after Jesus' 12 disciples—had missed it. Although I searched and searched, I found no reference to Jesus' Command in thousands of pages written by these men from A.D. 125 to 325. In their efforts to spell out correct doctrine and rules of conduct for the early church, these leaders had lost focus on Jesus' Command to love one another.

In fact, I could find no evidence that Jesus' Commandment had ever been restored to a place of being the main focus in the church. The words *love one another* are amazingly absent from all of the major church creeds and confessions dating from the time of the early church fathers to the present. Instead, emphasis was placed on the Ten Commandments.

Martin Luther focused on the importance of faith. But he did not see the fundamental truth of Jesus' One Commandment. Many Christian groups inherited Luther's focus on faith. But they also inherited his lack of emphasis on love.

After months of searching, I came to the sad conclusion that I was not the only one who had missed Jesus' Command. The major leaders in church history from the days of the early church fathers until now have not seen the importance of the second great commandment. Up to this time in history, loving one another as He loved us has remained only a small part of Christian teaching. It has not been given central importance as Jesus' Commandment.

The words Jesus spoke in giving His Command have always been in our Bibles. The words were there, but we hadn't seen them. It was like a dark cloud settled over the Commandment and hid its importance within the Christian faith. It was like thieves had come in the night and stolen away Jesus' Command.

And, in stealing the Commandment, they had also stolen the mark of a disciple. Jesus had said, *By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another* (John 13:35).

In fact Jesus had warned about this very thing when He gave the Great Commission. He had said, *teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you*. In the Greek language the word used for *observe* implies guarding, focus and protection. Jesus emphasized teaching others to guard—to protect from loss by never taking their eyes off—what He had commanded them. He had asked them to protect His Command from loss by keeping their focus upon it.

But, tragically, that had not happened. Jesus' Command—the one He owned as *My Commandment*—had been stolen away and never recovered.

Questions:

1. What are the two great commandments of the New Testament?
2. What great commandment did Martin Luther emphasize in his teaching? How did that impact the Christian faith?
3. What does the author share about the meaning of the Greek word for *observe*?

CHAPTER 4



YOU CAN ASK A QUESTION

Seeing Jesus' Command was having a great impact on me. I had come to understand that believing in Jesus and guarding the command He had given was at the center of true Christian discipleship. But at the same time I was torn between the New Command that I was now seeing and the two commandments I had previously believed summarized the Christian faith.

For years I had believed and taught that Jesus' command was, *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind . . . [and] love your neighbor as yourself* (Matthew 22:37, 39). But now I was seeing Jesus' command, *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another* (John 13:34).

In comparing these two, I found myself thinking, "If Jesus had said, 'These are my two commands, Love the Lord your God . . . and love your neighbor as I have loved you,' that would be much easier to accept."

But then on a February morning in 2003, I woke with a special sense of God's presence. In the quiet of early morning, I heard the gentle words, "You can ask a question." So I simply let the question come: "How could Jesus give us only one command—to love one another as He loved us—and not include loving God?"

As I lay in bed in the minutes that followed, three Scriptures and a recent experience came to mind.

First, I became aware that when Jesus gave us the New Command, He fully understood the New Covenant—that God would come to live in those who believed in Him. God had been with His people in the past, but now He would make His home in them. Paul spoke of this in his letter to the Corinthian believers: *Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that **the Spirit of God dwells in you?*** (1 Corinthians 3:16). In that moment I

realized that it would be impossible to love God if I did not love the brothers and sisters in whom He lived.

A second Scripture came to me: *If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that **he who loves God must love his brother also*** (1 John 4:20-21). With even greater understanding I saw that I could only love God as I loved my brothers and sisters *in* whom He now lived.

Yet a third Scripture came to mind. Jesus was telling His disciples a story. *For I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me. Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, "Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?" And the king will answer and say to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, **inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me**"* (Matthew 25:35-40).

It was as if Jesus was saying, "In every act of love for your brothers and sisters, you are actually loving Me." Lying there in those moments, I was amazed by the strength of God's bond with His New Covenant family.

Next, I recalled an experience from a few months earlier. I was preparing breakfast for my wife, Patti. She was sitting behind me at the kitchen table. Suddenly I had been surprised by a whisper: "Jesus came to your house for breakfast today."

The words were clear and simple and cut right to my heart. Tears filled my eyes. I was fully aware that only one person was sitting at the table behind me; it was my wife. Yet at the same time I realized I was fixing breakfast for Jesus.

If I wanted to serve Jesus breakfast, this was my chance. "Here's breakfast, Dear." I wanted to serve her. "Can I get you anything else? Water? Juice? Tea?"

It didn't happen overnight, but by the time a few months had passed, my attitude in serving Patti had changed. Understanding that I had the privilege of serving Jesus changed me!

God wants to receive love from us through obedience to Jesus' Command. In loving one another as He loved us, we love God the way He wants to be loved. Loving others is God's love language. More important than shouting toward the stars, "I love You, God," He wants us to love our brothers and sisters.

Questions:

1. What question was troubling the author? Can you identify with this question?
2. In the New Covenant, where does God live? Why is this important?
3. How does God want us to love Him?

CHAPTER 5



COMPARING THE OLD AND NEW

I had come to see clearly that the two great commandments of the New Testament are given in John's first letter. *And this is His [God's] commandment: that we should [1] believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and [2] love one another, as He [Jesus] gave us commandment* (1 John 3:23).

God commanded that we have faith in His Son. For me the familiar verse in John 3:16 summed up the first command: *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

Then on the night of the Last Supper, Jesus gave the second great command. *A new Commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another* (John 13:34).

But when I asked Christians, "What was Jesus' commandment?" more often than not, they responded with, "Love God with all your heart, soul and mind and love your neighbor as yourself." Most Christians—and I had been one of them—have substituted the two great commandments of the Old Covenant for the two great commandments of the New. How did we come to think this way?

It seems that it began with a question a Pharisee asked Jesus. *Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment **in the law**?" Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments **hang all the Law and the Prophets**"* (Matthew 22:35-40).

In giving this answer, Jesus summarized the two great commandments of the Old Testament. The Pharisee asking the question was an expert in the Law of Moses. Jesus made it clear that His two-part answer summed up the commandments found in *the Law*

and the Prophets. This two-part answer about the Old Covenant Law was never repeated by Jesus or any of the New Testament writers.

Clearly both the Old and New Covenants have two great commandments. For the sake of comparison I placed them side-by-side.

Great Commandments of the Old Covenant	Great Comandments of the New Covenant
(1) <i>Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all our soul, and with all your strength.</i> Deuteronomy 6:5	(1) <i>And this is His [God's] commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ.</i> 1 John 3:23
(2) <i>Love your neighbor as yourself.</i> Leviticus 19:18	(2) <i>Love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.</i> John 13:34

When I did this, I saw major differences between the two.

The two great commandments of the Old Covenant are based on *my limited ability to love* God and my neighbor. In the Old Covenant, I am the source of the love; it's up to me. The command is to love God with all *your* heart, all *your* soul and all *your* mind.

In contrast, I saw clearly that the New Covenant commands are rooted in *God's unlimited ability to love* me. God gives us the faith and love to be obedient to His commands. Jesus is *the author and finisher of our faith* (Hebrews 12:2) and He is the Source of the love. The love Jesus received from His Father enabled Him to love us: *As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love* (John 15:9).

Jesus' words in John 13:34—as *I have loved you*—are very important. Only as I remain in His love am I empowered to love others. John makes this point clearly when he writes, *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins* (1 John 4:10). *We love Him because He first loved us* (1 John 4:19).

When my son was born, I held him for the first time, looked into his little face and loved him. I rocked him in my arms, touched his little hands and loved him with every-

thing in me. I had no expectations of him loving me back. I didn't think, "You had better love me little baby with everything in you." He was my son; I loved him with no conditions attached. I loved my daughter the same way. God loves us like that.

I had believed in Jesus and the New Covenant. Yet I had made the root commandments of the Old Covenant the great commandments of my Christian faith. In doing this I had crowded out the great commandments of the New Covenant. As a result, I struggled with a bad feeling that I wasn't living up to what God expected from me. My responsibilities as a husband, father, son, friend and pastor kept me from being as devoted to God as I felt I should be.

In my thinking, if I loved God with *all* my heart, *all* my soul and *all* my mind, that didn't leave any of my heart, soul or mind left over for loving others—like my wife, my kids or people around me. In this way I wrongly assumed that the part of my love I gave to others and myself was a failure to love God.

Attempting to live by the great commandments of the Old Covenant actually creates a tension that moves us away from loving one another. The only cure for this problem is to fully embrace the great commandments of the New Covenant. When I do that, things fall into place.

Jesus' Command doesn't take away the importance of the two great commands under the Law of Moses. In the New Covenant, loving God and loving your neighbor are as important as ever. In fact, Jesus' Command fulfills the Old Covenant Law. *Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law* (Romans 13:10). Nothing is lost. Rather, what God has always desired is now fully realized in Jesus Christ.

Personally, I now find that loving God and loving people flow freely through both quiet and busy times, through times alone and with others. My expressions of love for God are woven through God-and-me times and through God-and-us times with my brothers and sisters. Prayer and praise start when I wake to the new day and end when I fall asleep at night.

Questions:

1. What are the great commandments of the Old Testament?
2. What are the great commandments of the New Testament?
3. What are some of the major differences between the two?

CHAPTER 6



THE PROMISED NEW COVENANT

To better understand the difference between the Old and New Covenants, I studied the story of God giving the covenant to Moses. Moses led Israel out of Egypt in a journey known as the Exodus. Their travels took them through the Red Sea and into a dry wilderness where they wandered for 40 years. In that desert, on Mount Sinai, God made a covenant with Israel through Moses. He gave Moses the Ten Commandments and the rules that would govern their relationship with Him, their relationships with others and their ways of daily life.

The link between covenant and commandment would have been well understood by the Israelites. The Ten Commandments given to Moses were kept inside the Ark of the Covenant. In fact, the Ten Commandments were the words of the Covenant. *And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments* (Exodus 34:28).

During the giving of the Law, God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai. *Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people* (Exodus 19:5). Moses came down from the smoking, shaking mountain and brought this news to the people. *Then all the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do"* (Exodus 19:8).

The people had given their word to Moses promising *all that the LORD has spoken we will do*. But that was as they stood at the base of the smoking mountain with the fear of the LORD upon them. Soon those same people had given up on God and were worshipping a golden calf.

Keeping the Law with its Ten Commandments was hard. David, the shepherd boy who became king of Israel, failed in a very clear way. He murdered a man in an attempt to cover up an affair he had with the man's wife. David had plotted to murder the husband after it came out that the woman was pregnant with his child.

In this one incident, David broke at least four of the Ten Commandments. He *coveted* his neighbor's wife, *committed adultery* with her, *lied* to her husband and then *murdered* him. And two of those sins—adultery and murder—were punishable by death.

King David was not a hypocrite or a God-hater. In fact, God described him *as a man after His own heart* (1 Samuel 13:14). Yet, David failed to keep the Law. Under the terms of the Old Covenant, he deserved to die because of his sin. The Ten Commandments and the fear of death weren't enough to keep even good people from sinning.

Something had to change. The people couldn't keep their part of the covenant. Through His prophets, God prepared the Israelites for a great change. Through Isaiah He said, *Do not remember the former things, Nor consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing* (Isaiah 43:18-19).

Then 100 years later, God told them that the new thing was a new covenant. Through Jeremiah God said, *Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD* (Jeremiah 31:31-32).

The words *new covenant* would have been very significant to the Israelites. A Covenant defined how God related to them and how they related to God. It was a binding legal agreement between God and His people. Now that was going to change.

Other words in the verses caught my attention: *not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers*. The New Covenant would be very different from the Old. Since the people had failed to keep the covenant, a complete shift was needed in the way God related to His people.

Jeremiah *continued*. *But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, "Know the LORD," for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sins I will remember no more* (Jeremiah 31:33-34).

In the New Covenant, God would personally give His law to each person. He would make it a part of them by putting it *in their minds* and writing it *on their hearts*. The Old Covenant Law had been written on stone. *He [God] gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God* (Exodus 31:18). But, in the New Covenant, there would be personal relationship between God and each of His people. He would personally be their teacher.

And the promise got even better. When God said, *for they **all** shall know Me*, He was talking about a covenant in which *all* would know the LORD. Under the Old Covenant, knowing God was not a common experience. Even the priests and prophets struggled. But *all*—regardless of age, sex, education or job— in the New Covenant would personally know God. *All*—both Jews and Gentiles—would know Him.

And, in the New Covenant, God would *forgive their iniquity, and their sins . . . remember no more*. A great change was coming!

After Jeremiah, the phrase, *new covenant* was not recorded again in the Old Testament. It would be 600 years before the words would again be used in Scripture—by Jesus on the night of the Last Supper.

When Moses had delivered God’s message to the people at the foot of the mountain, he had said, *The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like Me from your midst, from your brethren. **Him you shall hear*** (Deuteronomy 18:15).

Then over 1,400 years later, God delivered the same message to Peter, James and John. Jesus had taken the three disciples with him to the Mount of Transfiguration. There Jesus was transfigured before them so that His face shone like the sun and Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with Jesus. Then a bright cloud overshadowed them and God spoke, *This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. **Hear Him!*** (Matthew 17:5).

The Law, as represented by Moses, and the Prophets, as represented by Elijah, was now finding fulfillment. The giver of the promised New Covenant had come. God wanted all to *hear Him*—to listen to Jesus and His New Command.

In this context, I realized I had missed some very important words that Jesus had spoken. Although I Had embraced parts of the New Covenant, I had missed the New Commandment. It was as if I had failed to *hear Him*.

Questions:

1. Why was a New Covenant needed?
2. In speaking of the coming New Covenant, Jeremiah uses the words *not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers*. Why are these words important for us today?
3. What did God say to Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration? Why are those words important to us today?

CHAPTER 7



NEW COVENANT, NEW COMMANDMENT

On the evening before His crucifixion, Jesus announced the New Covenant and the New Commandment on the same night. The disciples asked Jesus where they should have the Passover meal and He directed them to a house in Jerusalem.

Scripture tells us: *When evening had come, He sat down with the twelve* (Matthew 26:20). *And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me”* (Luke 22:19). Then He took the cup in His hands and said, *This cup is the **new covenant** in My blood, which is shed for you* (Luke 22:20).

Jeremiah’s promise, *the days are coming*, had now come. The *New Covenant* was being given.

At this point, Jesus now *loved them to the end* (John 13:1); He loved them with the full extent of His love. *[He] rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel* (John 13:4-5). In this action, Jesus *loved them to the end*. He showed them, in everyday life, the heart of a servant. The Son of God humbled Himself and took the role of a servant.

Do you know what I have done to you? He asked them after washing their feet. *You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you* (John 13:12-15). The Teacher was teaching love; He was showing them a living example of the New Commandment He would soon give.

Next He told them that one of them would betray Him. Moments later Judas left the room to find those who would arrest Jesus. Jesus continued speaking to the 11 who

remained. He explained that He would be leaving them and they could not go with Him on this journey. Then, having just announced the *new covenant*, Jesus announced the *new commandment*: *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another* (John 13:34).

Jesus connected the New Covenant and the New Commandment by introducing both on the same night. The New Covenant came with the New Command. The two could not be separated.

Before, I simply had not seen Jesus' Commandment as a real command. Rather I had viewed it as one more truth in a series of teachings that Jesus gave. But although all truth in the Bible is equally true, not all truth is equally important. When Jesus said, *A new commandment I give you* and *This is My commandment*, He was assigning it the highest importance.

The Old Covenant is linked with the Ten Commandments God gave through Moses. The New Covenant is linked with the One Commandment Jesus gave. The New Commandment and the New Covenant are as connected as the Ten Commandments and the Old Covenant.

As a Christian, I had understood many new elements of the New Covenant. I knew of the new birth (see 1 Peter 1:3), the new creation (see 2 Corinthians 5:17), the newness of life (see Romans 6:4), the new man (see Ephesians 2:15) and the new way of the Spirit. The new way of the Spirit is talked about in Romans. *But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter* (Romans 7:6).

I had seen all these other new elements, but I had not seen the New Command. For this reason I had not actually been living in the New Covenant. Rather, I had been embracing the New Covenant in some ways, but then connecting it to the Ten Commandments given in the Old Covenant. By doing this, I was actually living somewhere between the two covenants. I had salvation by faith, but I did not know the freedom to live a life of love on earth.

Question:

1. Why is it important that the New Covenant and the New Commandment are connected?

CHAPTER 8



JAMES AND THE ROYAL LAW

It was becoming clear to me that a strong connection existed between the One Command Jesus gave and the many teachings about love in the rest of the New Testament. I began to see that the command Jesus gave is the source for all the teachings about loving one another in the New Testament. Because the writers of the New Testament knew Jesus' Commandment, their teaching about love was not just another piece of truth; it was foundational truth.

The transition to the New Covenant must have been very difficult for those first Jews who had accepted Jesus. Before believing in Jesus as Messiah, they had only known the Law of Moses. Now, they were stepping out of the Old Covenant they had known for centuries and embracing a new way.

One of the first New Testament books written was James. This letter was written decades before John's Gospel and letters—the New Testament books that give the clearest statement of Jesus' Command. James was overseer of the church in Jerusalem and pastored the first church there.

But James was not one of the 12 disciples Jesus had taught for three years. He had not heard Jesus give the New Commandment. In fact, James would have had no New Testament Scriptures upon which to rely. There was no written record of Jesus' Command. So, in writing his letter, James reached back into Old Testament Scriptures and chose one phrase from the book of Leviticus. *You shall love your neighbor as yourself* (Leviticus 19:18).

I was well aware that Jesus, in answer to a question asked by a Pharisee, had once mentioned this as the second great commandment in the Law of Moses. But now James brought these words forward into the New Covenant and the life of the beginning church. In doing this James was not trying to bring the two great commandments of the Old Covenant forward into the New. Rather, he was using this Scripture as a way of expressing the New Command.

Clearly James knew that Jesus' Command was different—new—fulfilling all that had gone before. To set it apart as new, he gave it a new title, *the royal law*. He said, *If you really fulfill the **royal law** according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well* (James 2:8).

James had already laid the foundation for the Royal Law. Earlier in his letter, he referred to this new law as the perfect law of liberty. He wrote: *But he who looks into the **perfect law of liberty** and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does* (James 1:25).

For James, the *perfect law of liberty* was the Royal Law—*love your neighbor as yourself*. For those who lived according to that law, there was freedom and blessing. James went on to urge believers not to favor the rich nor dishonor the poor, because to do so would not be in keeping with the *law of liberty*. He said, *So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the **law of liberty*** (James 2:12).

James contrasts *the law of liberty* with what he refers to as the whole law. *For whoever shall keep the **whole law**, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all* (James 2:10). Clearly, the Law of Moses—the whole law—did not bring freedom, but the Royal Law given by Jesus did.

James saw that the Royal Law was a perfect law that gave freedom. I think that is what Jesus had in mind when He said, *For My yoke is easy and My burden is light* (Matthew 11:30). Jesus' Commandment sets us free from the law we couldn't obey that gave sin authority over us. Jesus said, *Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed* (John 8:36). We can obey the New Command because we believe in the Source. It isn't up to us to produce the love. We only believe in Jesus and receive His love for us. He is the Source of the Love that flows out of us.

Questions:

1. What is the Royal Law?
2. How does the Royal Law bring freedom?

CHAPTER 9



PAUL AND THE LAW OF CHRIST

Like James, Paul was not one of the original disciples and had not been present when Jesus gave His New Commandment. Also, like James, he was writing about 30 years before John wrote his Gospel or letters. Therefore, he had no written record of Jesus' Command. Yet Paul, like James, used the word *law* in a new phrase.

Paul used the words *law of Christ* in his letter to the Galatians—one of the first letters he wrote. *Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the **law of Christ*** (Galatians 6:2).

Paul's reference to the *law of Christ* helped me understand what Jesus' Command looks like in real life. Whenever I help one of my brothers or sisters carry their burdens, I am obeying Jesus' Command and fulfilling the Law of Christ.

The word *burden* means a heavy load—something we are not meant to carry. It might refer to a personal weakness in a brother or sister that makes it easy to fall into a particular sin. The Law of Christ with its One Command to love one another, would move us toward this brother or sister rather than away from them. It would move us to restore them. The command of Jesus would make us gentle in our helping. It would lead us to act with humility rather than judgment, realizing that we too have weaknesses. When I obey the Law of Christ, I am moved with compassion to help carry the burden of a brother or sister in need.

Like James, Paul saw the Old Testament Scripture, *You shall love your neighbor as yourself* (Leviticus 19:18), as being fulfilled by Jesus' Command, to love one another. In his letter to the Romans he says, *Owe no one anything except to **love one another**, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "**You shall love your neighbor as yourself.**" Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law* (Romans 13:8-10).

According to Paul, the whole of the Old Covenant Law was fulfilled by obeying

Jesus' Command. *For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself* (Galatians 5:13-14).

Question:

1. How could the entire law be summed up and fulfilled in a single command?

CHAPTER 10



PETER'S LESSON

Peter was at the Passover meal with Jesus and the other disciples. On that night, just before introducing the New Command, Jesus had told them that He would be leaving soon and they wouldn't be able to go with Him. He had said, *Where I am going you cannot come* (John 13:33).

Peter was used to going places with Jesus; he was one of the three disciples who were often invited to go places the others weren't. In fact, Peter's immediate words after Jesus gave the New Command show that he was focused on Jesus leaving without him. Peter said, *Lord, where are You going?* (John 13:36).

However, somewhere along the line Peter understood the importance of loving one another. Thirty years later, he writes the Command twice in his first letter. *Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in **sincere** love of the brethren, **love one another fervently** with a pure heart* (1 Peter 1:22). *And **above all** things have **fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins*** (1 Peter 4:8).

In these two verses, I noticed that Peter surrounds the Command with words like: *fervent, sincere* and *above all*. When combined with *love one another* those words bring great power—power like that expressed in the phrase *for love will cover a multitude of sins*. I think Peter understood the importance of these words from his own personal experience.

Three times in the night before Jesus' death, Peter had denied knowing Him. After Jesus' arrest, Peter had followed at a distance to see the outcome. It was a cold night and he blended into a group of people who were warming themselves around a fire in the courtyard of the high priest. A young servant girl pointed at Peter saying, *You also were with Jesus of Galilee* (Matthew 26:69). Peter denied it. *I do not know what you are saying* (Matthew 26:70). The same thing happened two more times on that night.

Then, as morning came, a rooster crowed and Peter remembered His earlier talk with Jesus. Peter had said, *Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made*

to stumble. Jesus had replied, *Assuredly, I say to you that this night, before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.* And Peter answered, *Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!* (Matthew 26:33-35).

I think that Peter couldn't forget His shameful behavior that night; he felt he did not deserve to be a disciple any longer. So, as recorded in John's Gospel, after Jesus' crucifixion, Peter went back to fishing on the Sea of Galilee—taking six of the other disciples along with him. They had been out all night and caught nothing. As morning came, they were returning to shore when a man on the beach called to them to cast their net on the other side. They did and hauled in a huge catch of fish. At that point John recognized the man as Jesus and Peter jumped into the water to reach Him.

On the shore, Jesus had prepared breakfast for them over a fire. Again He took the role of a servant as He gave the disciples fish and bread to eat. Then, Jesus turned His attention to Peter.

So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter; "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes Lord; You know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" 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." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep" (John 21:15-17).

By an early morning fire, Peter had denied Jesus—three times. Now by the warmth of another early morning fire, Jesus had confronted Peter and led him to profess his love for Him—three times. When he felt he did not deserve to be a disciple because of personal failure, the strong love of Jesus had restored Peter's sense of value and calling. For Peter, love for Jesus was to be expressed by feeding the sheep—loving people. That is the call for all of us.

Weeks later, Peter would preach his first sermon. That day 3,000 people would become followers of Jesus.

Once again, I looked at the words that Peter had written 30 years after those two nights. *And above all things have fervent love for one another; for **love will cover a multitude of sins*** (1 Peter 4:8).

What about me? What about you? How many of us would have felt we did not deserve to be disciples if someone hadn't loved us enough to pursue us in our darkest moments?

Questions:

1. Why were Peter's words, *love will cover a multitude of sins*, especially meaningful to him?
2. What does Jesus' interaction with Peter teach us?

CHAPTER 11



I LOVE YOU

After seeing Jesus' Command, I knew I wanted obedience to His Command to become a way of life for me. I had the information, now I needed to get to the place where I could actually love others as Jesus loves me.

I realized that living a life of love requires that I have a source of love from which to draw. I need to come to a place where I know I won't run out of love. Where is that place and how do I get there?

To begin to answer those questions, let me tell you about an experience that happened many years ago. Patti and I had left our young son and daughter with relatives and were attending a six-month discipleship training school. One week the main speaker was telling us about the love he had for his children and about the love God, our Father, has for us.

On the fourth day of his speaking to us—about half way through his talk—I suddenly burst out crying. No one else in the room was emotional, but I was sobbing out loud. Patti began patting my back. "It'll be okay," she whispered. "It's all right."

As I struggled to control my emotions, one sentence kept coming to mind: "I want to hear my dad say, 'Son, I love you.'" I was fighting those words, trying to keep myself from needing them. "That's stupid!" I thought. "I've made it this far without hearing those words." I thought of my 82-year-old dad. "Why trouble him now," I thought. "He has been a good dad."

That night I started to write my father a letter. By the time I finished it three weeks later, I knew it was about something much bigger than hearing my dad say, "Son, I love you." It was about my inability to receive my Heavenly Father's love.

Over the years, I had built a wall around my heart. I had built it to keep people from hurting me—to protect myself from careless words and selfish demands. In my thinking

this wall allowed me to decide what I let in and what I kept out. But that wall actually was keeping me from experiencing my Heavenly Father's love. It was keeping His love from feeding my soul—a soul designed to hear the words, “Son, I love you.”

Weeks after mailing the letter to my dad, I got a letter back:

Dear son Gaylord,

Thank you for the letter you wrote to let me know how you feel.

I don't know if I ever said “I love you.” I should have said it. I am sorry because I didn't. It would have been better for you.

I love you. I wasn't used to hearing this when I grew up.

Love,

Your Dad

It was the best letter I've ever received. Dad's simple words taught me a valuable lesson. Dad never heard, “I love you,” from his father. You cannot give away what you don't have. You cannot give to others something you haven't received. Knowing we are loved by God enables us to respond in love—to God, to self and to others.

God told His Son that He loved Him. It happened before Jesus had performed one miracle or taught a single lesson. When Jesus was baptized, *A voice came from heaven which said, “You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased”* (Luke 3:22). It happened again on the Mount of Transfiguration: *A bright cloud overshadowed them, and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”* (Matthew 17:5).

Jesus lived with a sense of His Father's pleasure over Him. He didn't strive to gain His Father's approval or acceptance. He knew He was loved before He healed the sick, taught the crowds or fed the hungry. He knew His Father was pleased with Him before He went to the cross to die for the sins of the world.

Now, after seeing Jesus' Command, I am understanding in a deeper way that God is my Father. I had known that truth in my head for many years, but now it is sinking into my heart. God is more than a distant Creator. He is my Father and He loves me deeply. There is no love shortage in Him. He has enough to fill and overflow every one of us. *God is love* (1 John 4:16). And He loves me!

Slowly, one by one, the voices of self-condemnation are being silenced. I can now receive His words of approval. I have a growing sense of His pleasure over me. I am experiencing more of my Heavenly Father's love for me. Words of Scripture take on personal meaning. *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!* (1 John 3:1).

Before I had thought of God's love as being something carefully measured out—as if there were a limited supply. I had been used to thinking thoughts like, “Don't take too

much. You don't deserve it." That thinking affected how I loved others. I was limited in the way I loved those around me. I didn't want to run out of love. Besides, I thought I needed to conserve what love I did have in order to give it to God.

But now, I am learning of His infinite love—poured out endlessly for me. I've got a completely new understanding of God's love! *The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us* (Romans 5:5).

If I am going to love others as He loved me, I am going to need an endless supply of love! I need to be filled continually. Only then can rivers of His love flow out of me to other thirsty souls. Jesus said, *If any one thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water* (John 7:37-38).

When Jesus gave us His New Commandment, He never intended that we would fulfill it out of our own will or self-effort. He was counting on us receiving the love of God just as He had received His Father's love. *As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love* (John 15:9).

Receiving the Father's love will get us to the place where we were designed to live. His love enables us to live a life of love.

Questions:

1. What was keeping the author from experiencing God's love?
2. What is the connection between receiving the Father's love and loving one another as Jesus commanded?
3. In what ways do we receive and experience God's love?

CONCLUSION



As I think back over this journey of coming to understand more fully the love of God, I am reminded of several points. First, the subject of this book is very narrow, but very important. I am not addressing broad areas of theology or church history. My focus is on Jesus' One Command to love others.

Second, we should not turn to criticism—of people in history or church history. Looking back it is easy to see how they failed to recognize the importance of Jesus' One Command. But our fathers in the faith had to deal with challenges that we have never faced. We cannot fully understand the challenges they had in their day. Criticism of the past will change nothing. Yet, if we fail to learn from history, we will repeat the mistakes of our past.

Third, any progress we make in finding, obeying and living out Jesus' Command and letting His Love flow out from us must be carried in humility. Our response should be one of sorrow for the church's past failure to guard Jesus' Command. This will bring us to humble ourselves, to pray and turn from our personal failures to love one another as Jesus loved us. This repentance will make way for forgiveness and healing of the deep wounds created by our failure to observe Jesus' One Command.

Fourth, we must live in the present. I urge us all to take this understanding and live it out in our own lives by fully trusting in Jesus as our only Source of love. How we respond to seeing Jesus' One Command will be evident in the history being written through our lives today.

Finally, it is not about choosing between faith in Jesus or love for one another. It is living with faith and love together! It is the whole New Covenant—with the New Commandments. We are to both trust in Jesus and love as He loved! These two commands are the complete basis of the New Covenant.

I have shared some of my personal journey of how Jesus revealed to me a new and deeper understanding of His Commandment. I hope that you will start that joyful journey as well. I want you to live the rest of your life as a believer who deeply trusts in Jesus and

who guards—protects from loss by never taking your eyes off—Jesus' One Command. In this way, all people will know that we are His disciples.

Questions:

1. Can you relate to the author's finding of Jesus' Command?
2. In your experience, is there a need among Christians to find Jesus' Command?
3. How would your life change if you lived according to Jesus' Commandment?

Fill me with Your Love

God, thank you for being my Father and for Your lavish love for me. I want to be filled with Your love. Thank you for showing me Your love through Your Son, Jesus Christ.

Jesus, I believe in You—all that You said, did and are. I believe that You died for my sins and that You were raised on the third day. I am turning from my ways to Your way. Thank you for Your gifts of forgiveness and eternal life. You are my Savior, and I want to guard the One Command You gave—to love one another as You love us.

Holy Spirit, pour out your love in my heart. Fill me so full that rivers flow from me—refreshing everyone I meet. Holy Spirit, teach me how to be a true disciple and live a life of spreading your love.

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