

Love One Another

SS/HN 5/3/06 am

Reading: Jeremiah 31:1-14, I John 3

Study Text: John 13: 33-35

Sing Psalms: 100, 89:1-4, 92:1-6, 92:12-15

A large billboard in the centre of Delhi declared ‘Love is God’. Not only Hindus but millions around the globe believe this. ‘Love makes the world go round’ was the title of a popular song some years ago. Every human heart knows and wants to know love in some way. Our greatest joys come through love, but so do our greatest sorrows.

Love is in the very nature of man, but like all aspects of human nature it has been marred by sin. That is why it is so fickle and uncertain. That is why some who say ‘Love is God’ can march around destroying property and beating up those who disagree with them. That is why some who sing ‘love makes the world go round’ can walk out and leave their families destitute.

In the Bible we read a lot about love – both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. We read about love between people, love between man and God and love within the Godhead. Through Moses God made a covenant with his people, commanding them to love him and love their neighbour. The whole law can be summed up in these two commands (Matthew 22:40, Romans 13:9).

But contrary to popular opinion telling us that ‘Love is God’, the Bible declares that *God is love* (I John 4:8). This is a fundamental difference between the teaching of the Bible and that of the world. Even within the church we strive to maintain that *this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins* (I John 4:10). Too often the focus of the Christian life is on those ‘loving feelings’ rather than the exemplar and source of all true love, Jesus Christ.

Human relationships, and divine-human relationships also, can be described in terms of love, or the lack thereof. The command we have from Jesus is that love, rather than the lack of it, be the mark of all our relationships, especially those with fellow believers. Jesus demonstrated such selfless love and says that his is the standard we are to adopt.

Context

Judas had gone out into the night to betray Jesus. The scene was not exactly set for talking about love. But just prior to this very tense betrayal scene was another scene with Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. With Judas gone, Jesus can address the remaining eleven as *little children*. He reminds them that he will be leaving them soon – leaving for good. He will be going to a place where they will not find him. He was of course referring to his death; or more completely his death, resurrection and ascension. He went on to tell Peter that he actually would follow him, but afterward (13:36). Peter would go to be with Jesus in glory.

Jesus told the Jews also that they would seek him but could not come to the place where he was going (8:21). They would die in their sin. Unlike Peter and the disciples who believed in

Jesus, the Jews who rejected him would never see him in glory. They would die bearing their own sin, having no saviour to take their sin away. So it is with all who reject Jesus – they will die in their sin and be condemned eternally.

Commandment

In this context Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment. They will miss Jesus, their teacher and Lord. Who would be their teacher when Jesus was gone? Who would be their leader? We might have expected Jesus to appoint a successor. The Church of Rome is concerned about this. They think that Jesus appointed a successor and that they know who it is. And other churches believe in Primates and Archbishops also.

But Jesus did not appoint a new leader. He did promise to send the Holy Spirit to them – **all** of them (14:25). Even though Jesus was going away he would in fact continue to live – he would die but rise from the dead and ascend to heaven. To appoint a new leader would be to deny this truth. Jesus lives and reigns in the church today. Jesus is the head of the church.

If Jesus was not concerned about leadership, what was he concerned about as he prepared to leave his disciples? What did he want them to do? He was leaving them in this world with the daunting task of continuing his work. They would be responsible for taking the gospel of salvation to the whole human race. How did Jesus prepare them for this task? What was most important?

Love one another as I have loved you (13:34). This was what Jesus told his disciples to do. He called it a new commandment. You might want to question the ‘newness’ of this command. Under the Old Covenant the people were commanded to *love your neighbour as you love yourself* (Leviticus 19:18). In his first letter John, writing about this same command says it is not new, and then again that is a new commandment (I John 2:7-8).

In Greek there are two words for ‘new’, and the one used here can refer to things that are new in form or quality, not necessarily in time. Jesus sheds a whole new light on this command. Previously love was measured by self-love, now it is measured by Christ’s love. Jesus declared a new ideal, a new measure for love. Remember sin in our hearts corrupts even the love we have for ourself. Perfect love, love untainted by sin, is found only in Jesus.

This new commandment is directed at love for one another, or love for the brethren. Jesus taught in his Sermon on the Mount, and his parable of the Good Samaritan, that love for your neighbour, includes love for your enemies. We are to *do good to those who hate us, to pray for those who spitefully use us and persecute us* (Matthew 5:44). This command remains.

It is just that the focus of Jesus here is upon his disciples, upon those who had earlier been arguing about who would be the greatest and who had refused to humble themselves to wash the feet of their brethren. He was not talking about doing good and helping the sick or the poor. He was talking about being humble, about being a servant and being prepared to die for a friend, just as Jesus had done and was about to do. Jesus demonstrated the kind of love he was talking about when he washed the feet of his disciples. *Greater love has no man than that he lay down his life for his friend* (15:13).

Compliance

Years ago a seemingly mature Christian man protested to me about a Christian brother – ‘he has never apologised to me so I will not forgive him’. He also declared that since this brother did not speak to him, he would not speak to this brother either. Since his brother did not love him he would love his brother either. Are you familiar with such reasoning? ‘They never visit me so why should I visit them. He never helps me so why should I help him’. It goes on all the time – within the Christian community just as it does among the heathen.

Why is it so? It is because we let others be our standard for love. We comply to what others do, rather than to what Jesus has done. The love Jesus demonstrated and spoke about in this command is selfless, sacrificial and secure love. In Greek there is a special word – *agape* love. It refers to love from the will not just the emotions. The feelings will always be there, as expressed by my friend, but the will to love is different. This ‘higher’ love that rises above feelings and emotions is the standard set by Jesus for his disciples.

This love looks to Jesus, seeking to understand the greatness of his love for me. It admits that I am a terrible sinner deserving nothing. The more we look to Jesus the more we see our sin and the more we comprehend his amazing love – so high and long and deep and high – the love which *passes knowledge* (Ephesians 3:19). So in looking to Jesus we are humbled and we are moved to love one another as Jesus commanded. ‘With a standard like this’ writes Carson ‘no thoughtful believer can ever say, this side of the Parousia, I am perfectly keeping the basic stipulation of the new covenant’.

Certification

By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another (13:35). What an incredible statement. In a world where love is talked about every day, portrayed in almost every movie, and sung in every second song, how can brotherly love have such an impact for Christ? Love is all around us – but what sort of love? Is it the selfless, sacrificial and secure love demonstrated by Jesus? No. The love of Jesus has the power to impact this fallen world if – **if** it is demonstrated to the world. How will it be demonstrated to the world? By his disciples – by you and me in fellowship with Jesus and with one another.

If you ask a new convert what it was that attracted them to the gospel of Jesus Christ, more often than not they will tell you that it was the love of Christians. On the other hand if you ask someone why they are not interested in the gospel or why they have left the church what will they say? Too often you will hear about divisions in the church or fighting between Christians. You will hear about the ‘coldness’ of the church – not the building but the people. ‘If these people are reflecting the love of Christ in their life and fellowship then I want nothing to do with Christ’. What a terrible indictment upon such a church.

But love is not all you say. There must be teaching and sound doctrine. And you would be right. But remember no matter how sound the doctrine it will make only a hollow sound in the ear of the unbeliever if they fail to see love (I Corinthians 13).

‘By this’ said Jesus, ‘by love for brothers and sisters in Christ, all people will know that you are my disciples’. This was the command Jesus gave his disciples just before he died. Have you heard his words? Do people see Christ-like love reflected in your life?

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