

July 28, 2019

John 13:18-38

"What is Love..."

What is love {wait for it...by Haddaway}? Classic 90s song. That's a question posed by poets and songwriters and novelists and dreamers for as long as people have been around. What is love? Our culture gives us so many possible answers that it muddies up our perception of what the Bible says about love. In other words, when I try to define love, are my thoughts rooted in Scripture or are they reflecting what I've absorbed from my culture?

What is love? When we hear the word *love* one of the first things we think of is romance. Romance. Feelings. Love isn't a choice. It's something that happens. You fall in love. Love is something you feel. It's in the moment. You're love struck. You're lovesick. What is love?

How would you define love? Karl Menninger, one of the greatest

psychiatrists of the 20th century, said, "Love is the medicine for a sick

world." But what kind of love? That's the question, right? How many songs can you think of that have love in the title? We'd be here all day. "All You Need is Love." "Love Potion #9." "What's Love Got to do With It?" "Whole Lotta Love." "Crazy Little Thing Called Love." It's almost endless. Then there are books. "Love in the Time of Cholera." "Love Story" {with one of the stupidest definitions of love ever written - "Love means never having to say you're sorry."}. "For the Love of the Game." And movie titles. Love sells. But how would you define it?

When we try to get at a clear definition of love, everything is skewed by our assumptions about romantic love.

We're going to talk about a different kind of love today. It's the kind of love Jesus shows us in John 13. God's love is different. God's love isn't just a feeling. It's an action. In the Bible, love is a verb. It does something. Love makes a difference.

When someone says, "I'd like to be a better parent...a better spouse...a better friend...a better employer...a better employee..." whatever someone

wants to be better at relationally, what they need is to love in the way Jesus told us to love.

John 13 is going to help us strengthen our grip on love. And here's how we're going to move through the passage. We're going to first look at the middle. Then we're going to look at what bookends our passage. The middle defines what's at both ends.

Let's start with verses 31-35:

*When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

What's the most important sentence there? "A new commandment I give

to you." Already, Jesus has taught us to love the Lord our God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength. He said the second is like it; to love your neighbor as you love yourself. So Jesus has spelled it out for us. To love God. To love others. So what does he mean by a new commandment?

We know Jesus wants us to love God. He wants us to love our neighbors. He wants us to love our enemies. He wants us to love unbelievers. We get that. The new commandment is to love other believers. It's a specifically narrowed niche. Love other believers. And love them in a specific way...as Jesus has loved us. That's huge. It is a different quality of love. Jesus' love for us is the pattern by which we are commanded to love each other.

So, how does Jesus love us? Visibly. Intentionally. Sacrificially. Biblical love is seen on the cross. Can you handle loving people that way? Because when you do, you become channels of God's love, because that's how God loved us. "For God so loved the world he gave His only Son..." When you love others as Christ has loved you, people will see God's love through you. How good is that?

Let's now look at some ways chapter 13 changes our thinking about love.

First, Jesus challenges me to discern the difference between what I feel and what I do.

We all know this to be true. We don't always feel loving. Everything we hear from our culture says love is a feeling. And you and I know there are times when you don't feel very loving toward others. When love is all about emotions, there are going to be times when our emotions turn bitter or negative or dark sided, and that kind of emotional love won't be there.

Jesus says, "Love one another." That is a commandment. And it is a commandment for a different kind of love. Christian love is not an emotion. Because you can't command an emotion. {Show *Calm Down* meme} You cannot command someone else's emotion. And Jesus can't command an emotion in our lives. "You have to feel this way!" But Jesus can command an action. There will be days when I don't feel very loving. There will be days when I won't feel like loving certain people. But the commandment is still there. Jesus gives us a new commandment - Love One Another.

Here's the point Jesus is making. The feelings won't always be there. When every fiber of your being doesn't want to love, you act in love anyway. That's the kind of love Jesus shows us.

When you find out a friend shared something you confided in her about with someone else, you love her anyway. When one of your children has broken your heart, you love them anyway. When a friend carelessly breaks something that was important to you, you love him anyway. When Jesus looks down from the cross and says, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing," that's love.

Here's something you might want to write down:

**Biblical love is the difference between what I feel and what I do.**

Second, Jesus is showing us the difference between old and new.

It's not an old commandment. It's a new commandment. As in, "Go, and love." That kind of new.

Jesus is giving you a new way to love. That way of loving impacts every area of your life. It impacts how you raise your kids. It impacts the way you talk to people. It impacts the way you navigate the passion and challenges of marriage. It impacts the way you reach out to people who are different from you. It impacts every area of your life because it makes you unselfish. And there's nothing like unselfish love to change the way you feel about others and yourself. You want to know a key to self-esteem? Unselfish love. When you love as Jesus loves you...when you choose to love, you can't help but feel good about the path you're on. You know you are contributing buckets of goodness and kindness to your relationships. You know you are doing your part to make your little corner of the world a little better place. It's not that you're going to make other people's choices for them. It simply means you can be a greater agent for good when you choose to love unselfishly.

When we love in the new way Jesus has commanded us to love, three life-enhancing things will happen:

- We forgive one another as God forgives us. As Ephesians 4:32 reminds us, "Forgiving one another just as God in Christ also forgave you." There's power in that choice.

➤ We accept one another as God accepts us. Romans 15:7 says, "Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." That's what makes relationships work. I accept you and you accept me, as God, through Christ has accepted us both. And this acceptance is not based on conformity. It is based on unity in Christ. {Example using Ben and the shoes he wears on Sunday morning.} What a trite and superficial way to live. How damning it would be to spend life only with people who are just like us. We accept differences.

➤ We sacrifice for one another as Jesus Christ sacrificed for us. 1 John 3:16 says, "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters." What is love without sacrifice? Without sacrifice love is merely a mask for self-interest. Love is only satisfying with sacrifice.

All of what we've seen is the meaty center of the passage. Let's now briefly look at each bookend to get the flavor of it.

First, in the verses immediately preceding Jesus' new commandment, there is a back-and-forth about the betrayal of Judas. In the context of verses

31-35, everything Jesus does is an attempt get Judas to choose a different path. Judas can choose love. Jesus never gives up on him. Jesus knows Judas is a betrayer, but he never stops loving him. That is amazing. It says a lot to us about how much he loves us.

What is Jesus doing? He gives Judas a chance to walk back his plans to betray Jesus. He loves Judas. He sits down at table with Judas. Jesus accepts Judas. Notice it doesn't say Jesus approves of what Judas wants to do. But what a wonderful example of our Savior's love. There are things you've done or are thinking about doing or will do that aren't good, but Jesus still loves you. How about an *Amen*?

Remember, the new commandment to love is placed in the middle of two dramatic moments. The first is Judas. The second is Simon Peter. Verses 36-38 say:

*Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward.' Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.' Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for*

*me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times."*

Jesus loves Simon Peter. Jesus forgave Peter for all the times he blurted out the first thing that came to mind. Jesus forgave him for missing the new commandment here. Jesus forgave him for disowning him three times. Jesus chooses to forgive Peter. I am more like Peter than I am different from him. Where would we all be if Jesus didn't choose to love us?

Here's the definition of love we see in Jesus' life:

**While knowing what Peter would do, Jesus loved him as if he never had.**

Jesus knew Peter would disown him, but he washed his feet. Jesus loved and cared for Peter as if he never had or never would do any of these things. That's what forgiveness is. Forgiveness isn't ignoring what someone has done. Forgiveness is loving them as if they never had.

Remember, love is not a feeling. Love is a commandment. Love is a choice.

John brilliantly uses these stories of Peter and Judas to illuminate what Jesus wants us to understand.

Let's now fast-forward to the end of John's life. He lived to be around 90.

He was the elder pastor to the church at Ephesus. He wrote the gospel, the Book of Revelation, and 1,2, and 3 John. One story of church history has it that, near the end of his life, John spoke to the congregation at Ephesus.

He was the last remaining of the original 12 disciples. They wanted to hear from him once again about the life of Jesus. He looked out at them and said three simple words:

**Love one another.**

You have heard the new commandment. Will you do it?