

The New Command to Love

Douglas W. Cho, D.R.S.

[Matt 22:37-40] 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 great 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.”

[John 13:34-35] 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.”

We sometimes wonder about the difference between the Old and the New Testaments. Some say that we do not need to heed the OT because it was given to the Jewish people by God and the old era is past and that we need to keep only the new commandment. Yet, others teach that the Ten Commandments must be kept by all Christians because both the old and the commands are of God. The two scriptural quotes above are the words of Lord Jesus. The first quote from Matt 22 was spoken by Lord Jesus after a scribe asked Him what was the most important of all commands of God. Then, the second quote from John 13 was spoken by Jesus to His disciples on the last night with them before his suffering and death on the cross.

We note there is an important difference between these two commands about how we should love our neighbors. The first four of the Ten Commandments are about what our attitude and worship of God should be, while the last six are about our relationship with our neighbors. Here we may have a question about the Ten Commandments. Are they relevant to us who are living in the New Testament era? On this question, Lord Jesus gave us a clear answer. He tells us that the two tenets of the Ten Commandments, which define our relationships toward God and our neighbors, incorporate the entirety of the Old Testament in its essence. The scripture tells us that the entire bible is the words of God and is essential and useful in the teaching and spiritual growth of all believers.

[2 Timothy 3:16-17] All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

The apostle Paul states that the entire bible, both the Old and the New Testaments, is “profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction.” Therefore, castigating the Old Testament as only for the Jewish people and as not relevant to the New Testament Christians is like cutting away a significant portion from the body of God’s words. Instead of eliminating the OT from our application, we ought to learn how the OT commands are interpreted by Lord Jesus and His disciples and apply them to our lives.

The Ten Commandments teach us that we ought to love our neighbors “as ourselves.” Most of us love ourselves very much, high above everything else. When someone tries to harm us even by a little, we tend to react immediately and do all things within our reach to safeguard our health and well-being. Therefore, the command to love others like ourselves sets a high moral standard for our relationship with others.

There are, however, many people in the world whose love for self is low. Many are addicted to smoking, alcohol drinking, harmful drugs, pornography, or fast foods knowing fully well that they are harmful to their health and well-being. Some are driven to violent behaviors or illicit activities knowing well that such acts will likely result in their spending some years in jail. For these people, their love for themselves is not very high. Therefore, we may understand their actions against themselves and others based on the low level of their self-love. In this sense, God’s command to the Jewish people to love their neighbors as they love themselves set a limitedly high moral standard. Yet, Lord Jesus was pointing out to the Pharisees and the scribes that they were failing to practice this limited command.

The new command of love to “love one another as I have loved you” was given by Lord Jesus to His disciples, hence to all Christians of the New Testament era, just as the era of the Old Testament was ending with

His sacrifice on Calvary the next day. His command of love was to love, not as we love ourselves but as “Jesus has loved us.” How has Jesus loved us? Though He was God, He forsook the glory and authority of heaven, was born as the son of a poor carpenter in Galilee region of today’s Israel, lived a humble life for 30 years serving His earthly family, spent three and a half years in a lowly ministry entrusting His livelihood entirely on the kindness of those who accepted Him and never seeking material gains. Then, He willingly submitted Himself to the humiliation of an unjust judgment, unjustified cruel punishments, and died on the Calvary’s cross as the Lamb of God as the sacrifice for the sins of all sinners of the world, both of the past, present, and the future. He rose from the depth of hell, went up to heaven, and is now looking down onto all of us from the right hand of God’s throne. The Savior who so loved us is now telling us to love one another as He loved us.

This new command of love requires a much higher moral standard than that of the Ten Commandments. We may not have the honor of being crucified for the sake of the entire humanity, but the love of Christ can help us be crucified in our ambitions and fleshly desires for the sake of Christ, as the apostle Paul cried out, “I die daily.”

[1 Corinthians 15:31] I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.

In this sense, we can take part in the crucifixion of Jesus so that we attain the high moral standard of our Savior. When we do so, we can come to the place of loving our families and neighbors as Christ loves all humanity. May this be the testimony of all true Christians who aspire to reach the fulness of our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

[Ephesians 4:13] till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.