

AS I HAVE LOVED YOU

John 13:1-38
Key Verse 13:34

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

Did you know that I came all the way from Germany to tell you a beautiful love story — my own love story. For a long time I was alone and God knows, that it is not good to be alone. I became older and older but was still alone at the age of 30. But last year God amazingly answered my prayers and I could meet my wonderful wife Hanna. Whoever saw us was amazed by the love we shared with each other from the very beginning. Now after one year of marriage we still love each other like the first day. Last month, she even cried when I had to leave for only one weekend to go to the USA for conference preparation! And God has blessed us by giving us a baby boy, who is still on the way. But there is an even greater love story, the greatest love story of all. It is God’s love for us. “Love” is at the heart of the Christian community. “So loved...so love.” (Let’s look at the diagram again.) Then how can we love? Let us learn from Jesus in this passage.

FIRST, “UNLESS I WASH YOU”

It was just before the Passover Festival. The Passover celebrated God’s saving grace to Israel when he freed them from slavery in Egypt. This was the last Passover Jesus would spend with his disciples. Jesus knew that he had come from God and was returning to God. He knew that God had given him power and authority over all things. He also knew that one of his own beloved disciples would betray him. In this most difficult time, how did Jesus use his authority and power? Verse 1 reads, **“Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.”** Instead of thinking of himself, Jesus gave his full attention to his disciples. He loved them to the end! His disciples were called to represent Jesus to the world. But instead of loving and serving each other, they argued about who would be the greatest. They really needed Jesus’ further love and help.

Let’s see how Jesus loved them (4-5). Jesus, the Teacher and Master, suddenly got up from the meal, took off his robe and wrapped a towel around his waist. In the full view of his disciples, he poured water into a basin and carried it to where his disciples were sitting. Then, he bent down in front of the first disciple, and began to wash his feet. Without a single word, he went to the second and third disciple and began to do the same thing. That’s unbelievable! This was a task

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reserved only for lowly servants. Look how much Jesus humbled himself to love his own. Who else could love like Jesus? His love is unique.

Jesus came to Simon Peter to wash his feet. How did he react to Jesus' expression of love? **He said to Jesus, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"** (6) Jesus, the Incarnate God, washing Peter's dirty feet! Shouldn't someone else be doing this? Maybe Nathanael, or Peter's brother Andrew? Or perhaps even Young John? But definitely not Jesus the Master! Peter had no idea that Jesus washing his feet was the expression of God's redeeming love for him.

Jesus said: "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand" (7). Jesus said this to help Peter trust him. Did Peter accept Jesus' way of love and grace by washing his feet? **"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet"** (8a). How could Peter speak to Jesus like this! What was his problem? Peter was simply too proud to show his dirty feet to Jesus. He distinguished himself from the other disciples, thinking: "They may need your help...but I'm fine..." So he said: "NO!"

Jesus should be offended at Peter's response. But Jesus patiently loved him. **He said: "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me"** (8b). What a solemn warning to this loyal and faithful disciple Peter! Peter had left everything behind to follow Jesus. So Peter thought that his relationship with Jesus was based on his own loyalty and devotion. But this kind of attitude reveals Peter's pride and self righteousness! Jesus' words here **"Unless I wash you, you have no part with me"** tells Peter and us a life giving truth! To have a part with Jesus — that is to have a relationship that gives life — we have to be washed by Jesus. Jesus' relationship with us is entirely based on his grace. Jesus loved Peter. Jesus wanted to wash his dirty feet. This was a prelude to the washing of Peter's dirty sins by Jesus' blood shed on the cross. Unless Peter's sins were washed in Jesus' blood, Peter could have no relationship with Jesus.

When Peter slowly realized that his relationship with Jesus was threatened, suddenly he cried out: **"Then, Lord ... not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"** (9) He made a fast U-turn and asked for a whole bath! Instead Jesus told him, **"Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you"** (10). Peter was made clean through accepting the word of God taught by Jesus. Peter had committed his life to Jesus. But Peter would still need to be cleansed of his sins daily through repentance.

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Our family immigrated to Germany from Iran when I was 8 years old. Our background was Moslem, but I didn't believe in God. At the age of 17, a Christian friend from school invited me to a Bible conference. So I began reading the Old Testament to prove to him that God does not exist. But by the time I was reading the book of Exodus, my heart was moved by the living God of the Bible, and God convicted me to go to the conference. It was at that conference that I received Jesus' redeeming bath. There I prayed for the first time in my life: "God, if you really exist, prove it!" I was so proud and demanding. But Jesus heard my prayer and spoke to my heart through the Bible study. Jesus loved a proud and unbelieving teenager like me. He offered to forgive all my dirty sins. So I repented of my pride and unbelief and Jesus washed me clean. But even after coming into Jesus' fellowship, I continued to struggle with my sins – especially the sin of pride. At work I insisted on my own view point and argued endlessly to win an argument. In Bible study I held on to my own understanding of the Bible rather than accepting what my Bible teacher or Bible students would say. Then I suddenly felt like I need a bath all over again to be clean. But Jesus taught me in this passage that all I need to do is to bring my sins to him daily in repentance for cleansing. In that way, God is helping me grow in humility.

SECOND, "LOVE ONE ANOTHER" (12-38)

When Jesus finished washing all his disciples' feet, he put on his clothes, and returned to his place. He began to explain why he washed their feet. **"Do you understand what I have done for you ... You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you ... Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them"** (12-17). What a beautiful teaching Jesus gave his disciples! Jesus really wanted his disciples to be blessed and to experience the joy of true Christian fellowship. Think about it. The disciples' community could be blessed if it were established on humility and servanthip: Disciples helping one another—forgiving one another—bearing with one another—supporting one another. Everybody wants a fellowship like this, don't we? Wouldn't it be much better than having a fellowship of criticizing and backstabbing and competing with one another?

But how could we have such a blessed community? Jesus took the initiative to love first. The disciples were reclining at the table with dirty feet waiting to be

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served. Jesus was about to die on the cross. But he got up and began washing their feet. As Jesus took the initiative to love first, we have to take initiative and love first! If we wait for others to take the first step, we may be waiting forever!

While Jesus was working to create a beautiful love community, Satan was working to destroy it. See verse 21. Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, **“Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.”** It is hard to imagine how painful this must have been for Jesus. Usually when we are hurt by someone, we want to take revenge or get rid of them. But Jesus did what no one would ever do. Jesus loved the one who was about to betray him. Jesus offered Judas a piece of bread (26). It was an expression of Jesus’ love. In this way, Jesus loved Judas to the end. But Judas rejected Jesus’ love and went out into the night (30).

“When he was gone, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him” (31-32). Jesus knew that through Judas, he would be captured, and crucified. But Jesus did not see his betrayal as a tragedy. He saw it as a triumph and victory. Jesus’ death on the cross would glorify God. It would fully reveal God’s love to the world.

After that, Jesus began to share the key point of his teaching. Let’s read verse 34 together: **“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”** It is a “new” command! Of course, the command to love was in the Old Testament: **“Love your neighbor as yourself”** (Lev 19:18b). But Jesus’ command is new because he loved in a way no one had ever loved or known before. Jesus left his glory and lived among us. Jesus had hope for his disciples when they had no hope. Jesus bore with them when they were unchanging. When they failed, Jesus restored them. Jesus humbled himself and washed their feet like a lowly servant. Ultimately Jesus laid down his life on the cross to save them from their sins.

How can we love one another? Actually, we cannot love one another with our own strength and will. Honestly, some of us have no idea how to love one another. But we personally experience Jesus’ love when we accept his blood shed for our sins. Then the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts and dispels all the elements of darkness—hatred, jealousy, hostility, and criticism of one another. Jesus’ love enables us to love one another. Later, Jesus’ disciples began to love one another deeply as Jesus had loved them. Their love for one another gave birth to the beautiful first century Christian community. Their love for one another changed the world.

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Jesus' words "**Love one another,**" are not an option, but a command to obey. Most people think of love as a feeling. When they feel love, they love, and when they don't feel love they don't love. Then how can we obey Jesus' command to love one another when we don't feel like it? We must make a conscious decision of faith to love.

To be honest, it's been hard for me to love others. Of course, it's easy to love my wonderful wife and my unborn child. But it's hard to love my Christian brothers and sisters. In Germany I am a fellowship leader. I should love my fellowship members. But it's so hard to love them when they are so demanding. It is much easier to get angry with them, and to criticize them. But my Lord Jesus has been helping me to love as he loves. The power of his love is evident in our small Heidelberg UBF fellowship. When I first came to Bible study, I was selfish and demanding. How could anyone love me? But no one judged me. They accepted me and bore all of my weaknesses. They loved me. It was unbelievable! But when I grew in my faith I learned why and how they could love me. They loved me because of Jesus— because they were loved by Jesus. So I too wanted to love like this. But so often I find that my love is too weak to love a certain brother or sister in Christ. Yet, Jesus' love is strong— strong enough to enable me to love even when I cannot. Once, I thought I *had* to love. But now I really *want* to love, because to love like Jesus is the way of blessing.

What does Jesus teach us about the result of loving one another? Verse 35 reads, "**By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.**" Jesus clearly tells us who the real disciples of Jesus are. Love is the evidence that we are Jesus' disciples. Even if we are wonderful Bible teachers, great messengers, and passionate missionaries we cannot be recognized as Jesus' disciples, unless we love one another. Love is a witness and testimony that is vital to the Christian life and message. All over the world people are seeking true love. They are disappointed when all they find is selfish human love. They need to witness the love of Jesus in God's people. When we love one another, we are a blessing to the world.

Let's come to Jesus and be washed by his blood. Let's love one another by washing one another's feet. Let's love one another as Jesus has loved us.