

A NEW COMMANDMENT

John 13:18-38

Key Verses: 13:34,35

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

We are now studying John chapters 13-17, Jesus' last instructions to his disciples. At the beginning of his instructions to his disciples, Jesus had the Last Supper. At the Last Supper Jesus showed the example of how to love others. Let's look at verses 4 and 5. "...so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him." When Jesus approached Simon, Simon wantonly refused his Master's washing of his feet. Then Jesus said to him in verse 8, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." In this verse we learned that without learning divine humiliation and humbleness we cannot realize the love of God. Humbleness is the foundation of realizing the love of God. We also learned that Jesus loved his disciples to the full extent. So we too must learn the love of God, and love others. At the Last Supper the other disciples were happy to eat a regular hot meal with their Master. But the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Jesus. This was a heart-breaking event for Jesus. But in today's passage he continues to teach the love of God through two events.

First, the chosen Twelve (18a). Look at verse 18. "I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the scripture: 'He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.'" In this verse, there are two stories. The first is about the chosen people. The second is about Judas Iscariot's betrayal.

It is indeed amazing to read the history of Israel. Historically, we call the people of Israel "a chosen people." Of course, they did not choose God. John 15:16 says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last." In the ancient time God chose Abraham, who was 75 years old. When God chose him, he had a great hope to make him a man of many children who virtually could establish a nation. God wanted to make him great, even though Abraham wanted to remain as an ordinary person and die peacefully. Nevertheless, God definitely wanted to make him a blessing, not only for himself, but also for all peoples of all nations (Ge 12:3). We can say that Abraham was a chosen person because God chose him to use him as the ancestor of world salvation. In his time, Abraham was a gentle and nameless person. After several decades had elapsed, Abraham became the model for a chosen people.

When he chose Abraham, God was slow and steady to plant the love of God in his heart until Abraham became a friend of God. Genesis 18:18 says, "Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him." This tells us that God recognized Abraham as his friend. 2 Chronicles 20:7 says, "O our God,

did you not drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel and give it forever to the descendants of Abraham your friend?" Isaiah 41:8 says, "But you, O Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend...." James 2:23 says, "And the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,' and he was called God's friend." A chosen person is the friend of God. A chosen person is God's coworker, as well as the coworker of Jesus.

Exodus 19:5 says, "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine...." God chose the people of Israel not because they were good but because of his one-sided grace, in order to use them as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. For this, they were trained in Egypt for 430 years; they were also trained in Babylonian captivity. In the Babylonian captivity, one of the Psalmists said in Psalm 137:1, "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion." Probably the Babylonians had asked some of the people of Israel to sing because they were born musicians, like Mendelssohn. Then the people of Israel said, "How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?" (Ps 137:4) The chosen people Israel were trained people. So they never yielded. They never despaired in any situation. Simply because they were the trained, chosen people, they were hated by the people of the world, as much as the people of the world hated God. But their sense of being a chosen people enabled them to survive in the midst of long, long historical persecution and unbearable hardships. In Germany, Hitler wanted to rise to power, so he made use of the people of Israel as enemies of German patriotism. In reality, the German land was renovated by these chosen people and their culture was formulated by these people of Israel. But Hitler wanted to kill all the people of Israel in gas chambers. German Christians strongly opposed this. So Hitler moved the gas chambers to Poland and killed innumerable people of Israel there. Hitler also killed several millions of people of Israel in Russia. But they never forgot that they were chosen people.

The sense of being chosen people made the Jewish people stronger and stronger. In order to survive, they studied medicine for themselves and helped the needy wherever they went, and thus found a way to survive in the land wherever they were. At that time, communication was very difficult because there was no e-mail system. But the people of Israel wrote letters very diligently to their scattered friend-Jews. Thus they could encourage one another, and also they could get to know the world market situation. They traded well and became very rich. Wherever they went, they became medical doctors and bankers. And they became lawyers, because they were well-trained by the law of Moses. In Jesus' time, they laughed at Jesus' gospel ministry, saying, "We are descendants of Abraham, so we are saved." Of course, their sense of being a chosen people had been changed in character many times, because of their persecutions. Sometimes they had a sense of being a chosen people. Sometimes they forgot God completely. Anyway, they were very proud of being a chosen people of God. To be a chosen people is not easy, because they are not recognized by the world. They are nobodies and nameless in the world.

In his time Jesus chose the twelve disciples. Some were fishermen. One was a tax collector. Some were unemployed. But Jesus did not

choose people of echelon or rank, nor did he choose experts in the law; he chose people who had a learning mind. To have a learning mind is not easy. A servant of God tried hard for over fifteen years to influence two persons to have a learning mind. One was a woman and the other was a man. But because they didn't have a learning mind, they didn't learn a learning mind from him. The servant has been sorry for them. Jesus is indeed wise to choose men who had a learning mind. One day Jesus got up early and went to the seashore to pray and breathe in some fresh sea air. There was a man of the sea, Peter, who looked rough and wild. But Jesus said to him, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch" (Lk 5:4). It was not the right time for fishing, because it was daytime. Yet Peter said, "But because you say so, I will let down the nets" (Lk 5:5). Jesus is indeed wise, because he didn't include women among his disciples. From a worldly point of view, the chosen Twelve were nobodies and nameless persons. They had no official titles except "one of the band of Jesus of Nazareth." To be chosen as one of the disciples might have been considered a misfortune, because they didn't get a paycheck every other week. Jesus was always busy in healing and preaching ministry. He never mentioned his disciples' future marriage problems. In addition, people's contempt and rejection of them were unbearable. One time Jesus was passing by one of the towns of Samaria. The village people sensed that Jesus was going up to Jerusalem to become the Lamb of God. They didn't accept Jesus' company to stay overnight. It was really a humiliating event. In their lifetimes the disciples were humiliated, but now everyone wants to be like them.

So in America parents name their children "Mark," "John," "James," or "Peter," or in a woman's case, "Pauline," "Mary," or "Maria," or "Joan." Even the greatest figures in the Catholic Church were eager to have apostles' names. One Pope's name was John Paul I, and his successor was John Paul II. Maybe the next one will be John Paul III and IV. They want to have two apostles' names all at once. Many parents in America are hesitant to make their children servants of God. But in their deep souls, most of them want to raise their children like one of the apostles or one of the ancestors of faith. If someone goes to a department store and calls "Mark!" then dozens of people will answer him. It is indeed amazing that even in Russia there are many children named after the apostles or ancestors of faith, such as "John," "Andrei," "Mark," and so on. Nobody wants to name their son, "Caesar," who was once the Emperor of Rome. Maybe it is because Caesar has become a name for dogs. All people, even evil people, want their children to be devoted and loyal and committed apostles of Jesus, or like one of the ancestors of faith. Let's be proud of ourselves to be a chosen people in this corrupted generation.

Second, Judas' betrayal (18b-21). In the last part of verse 18, it is implied that one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, was going to betray his Master. Verse 18b says, "But this is to fulfill the scripture: 'He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.'" Psalm 41:9 says, "Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me." Here the phrase "lifted up his heel" precisely means the starting motion of betrayal. But Jesus did not think of Judas Iscariot's betrayal as betrayal; he thought of his betrayal as fulfilling the scripture. Jesus thought of Judas Iscariot's betrayal as the providence of God. Jesus was glorified and

ennobled in his thought world. How on earth could Jesus admit the providence of God while looking at the betrayer, Judas Iscariot? Most people are fatalistic. One young man received a sports car as a college graduation gift from his mom. But he squashed his newly bought car, bumping against an electric pole in his excitement while riding with his girlfriend. Then he thought it was a sign of his misfortune in the future. He became a very fatalistic person. Later he became a drug addict, then a mental patient. Our Lord Jesus Christ did not think of betrayal as such a terrible event, but as the providence of God. Also, Jesus thought of Judas Iscariot as an agent of fulfilling Bible prophecy.

We thought about the betrayal of Judas Iscariot, which might be a common story in modern times. But betrayal is the most bitter event to anybody. Joab, the commander-in-chief of King David, supported Adonijah, the fourth son of King David, while David was senile and in bed. Joab was the most loyal and superior commander-in-chief of King David. Therefore, he should have sided with King David and reported to his king about Adonijah's conspiracy. But he sided with Abiathar the priest (1Ki 1:7). The prophet Nathan reported this to King David, and King David made Solomon his successor. So when King David was dying, he charged his son, King Solomon, about Joab, "...do not let his gray head go down to the grave in peace" (1Ki 2:6).

It is a sad story to tell, but there was the worst betrayer in Bible history. He was David's third son, Absalom. In fact, he could have been the crown prince, but Absalom murdered his brother Amnon at an opportune time, because Amnon had disgraced his sister Tamar. Then Absalom ran away and lived in exile. Later, King David allowed his son Absalom to come back to Jerusalem. But when Absalom made a royal visit to his father, the king would not see him face to face because he had killed his own brother Amnon. What is worse, David was indifferent to him for quite a long time. Absalom wanted to see his father face to face, even if he had to be punished. But King David continued to be indifferent. King David made Absalom's heart crooked through his indifference. When Absalom became crooked, he conspired to overthrow his father's kingdom so that he would become the king of Israel. Because of this, David left the palace and went to a refuge with his royal subjects. King David chose a refuge place where he could defeat Absalom's men completely. He asked his generals to be gracious to the young man Absalom when the battle was about to be waged. When he heard that Absalom's heart was torn into many pieces by Joab's three javelins, King David cried, "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you--O Absalom, my son, my son!" (2Sa 18:33). Absalom's betrayal caused King David to grieve over him all his lifetime.

Jesus had to tell his disciples about the betrayal of Judas beforehand, so that when he was betrayed, tried, and crucified, they would not stumble but have faith in God. He told them so that when they saw his betrayal and crucifixion, they would recognize him as the Son of God and also accept God as God who sent him to the world. Let's read verses 19-20. "I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He. I tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me."

Look at verse 21. "After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, 'I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me.'" Jesus was greatly troubled in spirit, but he had to tell the truth to his disciples that one of them would betray him. Then what happened? His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant (22). One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him (23). The man of big mouth, Peter, could not ask Jesus about this matter directly. So he approached John and nudged him in the side as a sign that he should ask Jesus who was going to betray him. Then John, leaning back against Jesus' breast, asked him, "Lord, who is it?" (25) "Jesus answered, 'It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.' Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him" (26-27). In these verses, one absolute Biblical truth is clearly revealed. Here, the bread Jesus gave to Judas Iscariot was his utmost expression of love for Judas. Giving bread meant giving his own body to Judas Iscariot. At the moment, Satan entered into him, channeling through his impure motive. In this event we learn that at the moment we are going to receive the love of God, Satan greatly hinders us.

Jesus still really wanted to spare Judas and save his soul. So he said in verse 27b, "What you are about to do, do quickly." It was Jesus' warning to come back to him and not be devoured by Satan. What was the other disciples' response? They had no idea about Judas Iscariot's betrayal. So they thought Jesus told him to go to a grocery store and come back, because he was in charge of the money bag.

What happened then? Jesus gave the piece of bread to Judas Iscariot. What was his response? Look at verse 30. "As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night." This verse might be the best expression in all literature. This verse expresses the love of God in Jesus, the betrayal of Judas and his future eternal condemnation. "As soon as Judas had taken the bread" means Jesus' love for Judas is to the end, despite his betrayal. Judas Iscariot received the bread. But he went out. In other words, he rejected the love of Jesus, even when the bread of Jesus was in his hand. What happened then? It was night. It means that he crept into the darkness, where there is eternal condemnation. Who can write this kind of verse? We are sorry for Jesus, because his love was rejected. We are sorry for Judas Iscariot, because he rejected Jesus' love and became a man of darkness.

Third, you must love one another (31-34). In this part Jesus tells about his departure after his crucifixion (31-33). At this moment Jesus had a heart's desire for his disciples to come to know the love of God, and to love one another. Jesus wanted them to learn his humility, sacrificial life, and obedience to God's will. But the disciples were not likely to do so. They were frustrated to hear about Judas Iscariot's betrayal. They doubted themselves, wondering if they would be like Judas Iscariot. So Jesus gave them a new commandment. Look at verse 34. "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." Sometimes it seems that we love one another, but in fact we meditate on many evil things about others more than we love them. That's fallen human nature. Therefore, Jesus gave them a new commandment. In reality, it was not a new commandment. It

was precisely stated in the Ten Commandments to love God and to love one another. It was not a brand new commandment. But Jesus said, "a new command," because to the disciples it was very new. We cannot love others. When we want to love others, we hate others more. But Jesus said, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. We must accept the love of God in Jesus and obey his new command to love one another.

Fourth, a good influence (35). Let's read verse 35. "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Jesus commands us to be influential men and women of God so that people will know that we are disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. Here Jesus is talking about our Christian influence. There are many who work hard but have no influence. Someone is known as a man of no influence and a selfish person, though he works hard for Jesus. The man is known as a terrifying character. At the pioneering stage he was the most sacrificial man who did everything for our fellowship--within and without. He worked hard, but he was known as a man of no influence. It is because he did not listen to our Lord Jesus' supreme command, "Love one another," and as a result, he could not be a man of influence. We must remember that we cannot be selfish. We must be men and women of influence, as our Lord Jesus Christ was. In Christianity, influence is the most powerful factor.

There was a servant of God. He was known widely to the Christian world. But he could not forgive his step-mother's ill treatment for 19 years. His step-mother became a completely transformed Christian, and she could even love her step-son. After she was transformed, her own daughter became pregnant at age 17. And she suffered from a stomach ulcer because of her wayward daughter. Once the young man visited her. Then his step-mother hugged him with great affection and loved him like her own son. But the young man did not respond to her hugging. It was because the young man had never thought about forgiving her. It took the young man 15 years of struggling to forgive her. In order to love one another, we must know how to forgive others. Mark 11:25 says, "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins." In order to love his wife, a husband must know how to love his wife's weaknesses and mistakes and embrace her. That's the meaning of forgiveness. Our Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins. He bore all our transgressions and iniquities and hung on a tree to forgive us. Forgiveness is the fountain of the love of God.

Fifth, human loyalty (36-38). Peter wanted to follow Jesus wherever he went. Peter had a strong decision and heart's desire to be loyal to Jesus to the end. But Jesus indicated that he was leaving them. So Simon Peter asked him, "Lord, where are you going?" (36) Jesus quietly answered, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later." It meant that Peter could not be crucified and rise again like Jesus. But he could go to the kingdom of God after Jesus' death and resurrection. Then Peter was very upset. He asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you" (37). Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times" (38). Jesus was telling him that with human loyalty he could not follow him in his trial and suffering and crucifixion, or in his rising again from death.

Jesus was not at all humiliating Peter. Jesus was telling him that human loyalty is not enough to follow Jesus. Peter's three denials during the passion week show us that human loyalty has a great limitation (Jn 18:15-27). So we unintentionally betray our friends, and some even abandon their wives like dirty rags and their children like oinking piglets. Therefore, we must not be men and women who live with human loyalty and family ties for small benefits. We must commit ourselves to our Lord Jesus Christ. Many people worry about commitment. But nobody can commit himself to another person or even to a church. We can commit ourselves to God only. Then God can use us anywhere, anytime.

Let's obey Jesus' command, which says, "A new command I give you: Love one another." Let's obey Jesus' command absolutely.