

John 15: Jesus' “Viability” Theology

One Single Command

John 15.17

⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.

¹⁰ If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love,
just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.

¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command.

¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business.
Instead, I have called you friends,
for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you
so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.

Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.

¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.

My Single Command

“This is my command: Love each other.”

For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. . . . We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death.

1 JOHN 3.11, 14

- ❖ Jesus has come to the end of his teaching ministry, both publicly and privately with his disciples. Through his three years of ministry, Jesus has given many instructions. To his disciples this evening, he has emphasized obeying his commands just as he has obeyed his Father’s commands (v. 10; cf 14.15, 21). Yet, as he concludes his teaching on fruitfulness, he does not speak of “commands” (plural), but says: “This is my command (singular), Love each other.”

- ❖ Is this simply a summary statement about fruitfulness? (Most commentators give this verse only cursory treatment, considering it to be a summary conclusion or a transition to his next emphasis in the second half of the chapter.) What does Jesus want his disciples, and us, to grasp with his simple, single command?
- ❖ Earlier this evening, Jesus gave the disciples his “new command”—“Love each other” (John 13.33). He had already exemplified the spirit of this new command by washing the feet of his disciples and commanding them to follow his example (13.15). He had instituted a new covenant represented by the Passover bread and wine symbolizing his sacrificial death. All the while, the disciples had bickered about who among them was the greatest; Judas had left to initiate the betrayal and arrest of Jesus, and Peter had inflated his loyalty to Jesus above all the other disciples (Matthew 26.33). Not to be outdone, the other disciples had also asserted their absolute faithfulness to Jesus, no matter what might occur that night.

❖ In the midst of petty arguments, betrayal, and personal vanity—

*Having loved his own who were in the world,
he now showed them the full extent of his love. (13.1)*

❖ Perhaps, many years later, Peter was looking back at this night with all of its contradictions, selfishness, and ugliness, when he wrote:

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. (1 PETER 4.8)

❖ Jesus has just spoken of “fruit-bearing mission”—the ultimate purpose of every branch vitally connected to the True Vine. His mission—to reveal grace and truth from the Father to sinful humanity, to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3.8), and to satisfy the judgment of God against rebellious and offensive humanity—is about to reach its climatic fulfillment. Its sole origin and motivation:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (JOHN 3.16)

❖ Not duty, pity, moral superiority, or any other motivation; no other influencing force could cover our offenses and reconcile us to God—only love. Thus, the Apostle John was inspired by the Spirit to write:

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 JOHN 4.7-11)

Nothing can produce reconciliation except a sacrificial heart of love that is willing, at one's own expense, to forgive and reconcile. This is how Jesus has loved his disciples; it is how you and I are being loved by him. We cannot produce his fruit and prove that we are his disciples by any other spirit or action.

The Qualifying Command

“This is my command: Love each other.”

“So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”

JOHN 13.33-34 NLT

❖ We have heard Jesus emphasizing that a tree is known by the evidence of fruit.* There is no evidence of viability or authenticity without fruit—either to the “True Fruit-Inspector” or to the unbelieving world. It is our single qualifying evidence.

Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister. (1 JOHN 4.20-21)

* Matthew 12.33

The Impossible Command

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.” (15.12)

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. . . . Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. (1 JOHN 4.7-8, 11-12)

- ❖ The nature of this love is super-human. It is more than love for those who love us; it is love for those who have betrayed, hurt, offended us. How is it possible to love as God has loved us? Only through the vitality of the True Vine; only through his spirit and nature flowing into the branch. Only by spiritually and deeply abiding in him so that he alone affects and influences us. In our own efforts, we will fail; but as we submit to and abide in him, his love is made complete in us.

— ADDITIONAL REFERENCES —

Jesus made this “single command” emphasis of love elsewhere, as did the apostles in their letters. “God is love” (1 John 4.8), and the work of reconciliation proceeds from that love (1 John 4.10). Whatever the commands God has given, they all “hang” on this single command to love.

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

The Apostle Paul emphasized to the Corinthians that without love (whose specific characteristics he then defines), “the most excellent way” as our motivation, it doesn’t matter what we do or how much we do. The Apostle Peter emphasizes that “above all” we are to love in the same deep “reconciliation-accomplishing” manner that we see in God’s love for us.

And yet I will show you the most excellent way.

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

1 CORINTHIANS 12.31b-13.3

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

1 PETER 4.8