Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (8-10-1978 Strandtown Baptist Church)

John 13:34,35

Introduction

Wishes from dying lips are sacred. They sink deep into memories and mould future lives. So here, the last command of Jesus. His dying wish. He was going on a journey without them. Concerned for their future, He wanted them to remain a unity.

They were already familiar with the commandment to love their neighbour as themselves (Leviticus 19:18). The Jews limited this to fellow Jews, and that is why Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan to show that "your neighbour" applies to all men, even your traditional enemies. You have to care for their interests and welfare as for your own. This commandment is still valid.

Here Jesus is not concerned with relation to all men generally, but to the special bond of love which should unite all Christians. Within Christian fellowship, each of us is to be linked to each other by a love like that which Christ had for each one. Therefore this commandment has a narrower range and a more intense quality. If only the church really kept this, the power of its witness would be irresistible, because the world would see at last true discipleship.

Reason for speaking of a New Commandment

Archbishop Ussher had heard of the wonderful power of Samuel Rutherford's devotion and family life, and he wished to see it. He disguised himself as a poor traveller and was entertained by Rutherford. It was a Saturday night, and Rutherford's wife catechised the children and the servants in the kitchen. The disguised Archbishop was put among them, and Rutherford's wife asked him how many commandments there were. He said there were eleven, and she rebuked him for not knowing the right answer. He went to bed, and got up in the night to hear Rutherford's midnight prayer. He was charmed with it. He revealed himself to the couple. He borrowed a newer coat and preached for Rutherford the next morning. He surprised Mrs Rutherford with his text, "A new commandment I give unto you." He began by saying this might properly be called the eleventh commandment.

But in what ways may this commandment be called new? Various reasons. It was for new people, new motives, new obedience, new clearness, new intensity, and new natures. Going to concentrate on two of these reasons – (1) that the commandment is for new people – the object of our love is for Christians; and (2) there is a new motive and pattern to follow – loving as Christ has loved us.

Love is to be concentrated on fellow Christians, fellow believers. We have to love all men, but especially those in the same spiritual family. **Do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers** (Galatians 6:10). They are in the same special family within the larger human family. Separated from it by inner spiritual life.

Christians may be divided by race, language, temperament and occupation, yet at the deepest level and in the most important things we are at one. We have the same Father, same salvation, new natures in Christ, same home, same hopes and fears. Therefore we are closer to Christian men in a distant country than we are to non-Christians who live next door to us. **There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus** (Galatians 3:28).

There is an intensity and quality in this love which is quite different from love to all men. We are called here in this commandment to recognise the oneness which unites us to other Christians. Make sure we live it out. It is not a sentimental love, but is very practical and down to earth. It must not merely be a notion in our heads, but a love that we practice in our lives. Of all Christ's commands, there is none which is so much talked about and so little obeyed. In practice, we regard fellow Christians as in a special sense our brothers and sisters, and delight to promote happiness. We abhor the idea of envy, malice, jealousy, gossiping about members of Christ. Christ's cause on earth would prosper far more in the world than it does if this simple law was more honoured. There is nothing the world understands and values more than true love. The very men who cannot understand doctrine and know nothing of theology can appreciate love. It arrests their attention and makes them think.

How much we have to learn about this. In practice, there is an unbelievable amount of bitterness, needless controversy, bickering, ill nature, maliciousness, hostility and viciousness among fellow Christians. Very sad when one side Christian seeks to denounce another who takes a different standpoint on a certain issue. This is an unacceptable face of much evangelism.

<u>The example by which the New Commandment is expounded by Christ</u>

As I have loved you. Jesus sets the pattern and provides the example. Firstly, He loved them unselfishly. He certainly had nothing to gain from associating with men like this, and nothing to learn from them. He owed nothing to them. They owed everything to Him. Nothing good in them, except what His grace had put there. Even in noblest human love there is an element of self. Often we have an eye on the effects of the love which we show – the happiness or thrill which we get. What am I getting out of this? Jesus got nothing out of it. His one desire was to give Himself and all He had. His one desire was to do something for them.

Secondly, He loved them patiently. What a bunch the disciples were. How long would we have put up with them? They were dull and stupid. Though they were told the truth time and again, they still did not see it. They grieved Him with quarrels and petty selfishness. In the end, they forsook Him and fled. Consider the treatment of Judas – Jesus still loved him knowing all that Judas was about to do to Him. Knew all there was to be known about these men, yet still loved them. His love was not blind, but very open-eyed as far as He was concerned.

Then, He loved them practically. No more effervescence and emotion. Shared all He had with them. Condescended to wash their feet. Then finally gave His life for them. **Greater love has no one than this, that He lay down His life for His friends** (John 1:13). No limit to what His love would give or where His love would go.

To love as He loved them – unselfishly, patiently and practically. What a challenge, and how we are shamed by failure here.

Result by which the precept is enforced

By this all men will know that you are my disciples (John 13:35). Our love for each other is meant to be our badge, our distinguishing feature, and our outstanding characteristic. Not gifts, miracles, intellectual attainments, great preaching, nor even orthodoxy. But love – a grace within reach of poorest and lowliest believer.

It was a marked characteristic of the early church. Tertulian (200A.D.) "It is mainly the deeds of love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. 'See', they say. 'How they love one another?' for they themselves are animated by mutual hatred." Christian love made a deep impression on pagans. They visited one another. In times of plague no Christian died unattended. They cared even for pagan sick when deserted by relatives.

Fellow Christians will be recognised as Christians. Even when we differ from them, it is apparent that we love them. At the time of the controversy between Whitefield and John Wesley, someone asked Whitefield, "Shall we see John Wesley in heaven?" "No, I don't think we shall", was the reply. Then, to the disappointment of the enquirer, Whitefield clarified his reply, "I believe Mr John Wesley will have a place so near the throne, and such poor creatures as you and I will be so far off, with such great crowd in between, that we shall certainly not see him."

Also the outside world will recognise us as Christians. Are we recognizable Christians? How do people know? The question is not whether they know we are sound, go to church, take our stand on various issues, don't go to certain places or mix with certain people. Do they see a love which is unselfish, patient and very practical?

Conclusion

How do we love as Christ loved? Through the indwelling of Christ. Christ's love is to be shed abroad by the Holy Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit – love.