

The New Commandment

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The New Commandment

"A new commandment I give unto you that ye love one another." (John 13:34); I Cor. 13.

There is a beautiful tradition of the last days of the apostle John. He had gathered together his disciples for a parting message. As he looked into their faces with all the tenderness of the parting moment, he said to them: "Little children, love one another." But they said, "Father, we have heard that message before. You have been telling us that *from the beginning*. Give us some other word." Again looking down upon them, he said with increased tenderness, "Little children, that which ye have heard *from the beginning* that speak I unto you, that ye love one another." "Ah!" they replied, "but you have been giving us that message ever since we have known you. Now that you are going away we want some parting word by which to remember you. Give us some *new* commandment tonight, father." And then for the last time he said, "Little children, dear little children, a *new commandment* I give unto you, that ye love one another." He had no other commandment. All of the commandments were bound up in that one great bundle of love and obedience, that we love not ourselves, but love others, as Jesus our Lord has loved us.

Plunging then into the heart of our subject of

the love-life, let us note, first:—

The Kindness of Love.

“Love suffereth long and is kind.” And what is this kindness of love? It is this: That no matter how much love is ill-treated or scorned; how much it is ignored or neglected; how little return or requital is made to it, yet it suffers all these things and *stays* kind. It is the fixedness of love amid all sorts of slights and lack of appreciation. It is the ceaseless lovingness regardless of how people mistreat it.

I was sitting one day in the home of a Christian woman. Suddenly there came a knock at the door. She opened it, and there stoop a tramp asking for food. As it happened she had nothing but bread and butter in the house, which she promptly gave him. He passed through the gate, walked to the edge of the sidewalk, and threw the bread into the gutter. She saw the act from the window, and turning to me she said, “There, that is the last tramp I will ever feed.” She had love enough to give to one who seemed to be in need. But when that love was flouted, when it was mistreated, it could not stay kind, it could not abide. What then does God mean here by the love that suffereth long and stays kind? It is like this:—

One morning away down in sunny Italy, I awoke conscious that my bedroom was heavy with the fragrance of heliotrope. I arose and searched my room. I could not see a spray nor a blossom anywhere. I walked to the casement

and opened the shutter and the mystery was revealed. There, growing like a climber was a magnificent bush of heliotrope laden with a mess of beautiful blooms. All night long its locks had been wet with the dews of the night; but still it poured forth its fragrance. All night long its tendrills had been chilled with the cold mountain airs; but beauty had been hidden in the enshrouding darkness, but it withheld not one atom of its fragrance. No eye beheld its beauty; no soul was ravished by its exquisite perfume. What a neglect! How shameful such treatment seemed to be! But what of that! Was it not a heliotrope? Had not God made it to send forth fragrance? And why should it not continue to pour forth whether man slept or waked? And so all unseen, unsensed, unappreciated, it kept pouring out its wealth of fragrance, filling every nook and corner of the sleeper's room with the ceaseless out pouring of its own life of sweet-scentedness.

Behold the love of God! Behold the kind of love God Himself would live through us! A love which keeps on loving despite all neglect. Yea, here is the difference between the fine gold of God's love, and the common clay of our human love. We *have* love. But it flees away when illtreated or neglected. God *is* love. And, like the heliotrope with its wealth of fragrance, God pours out the riches of His love unceasingly upon all, in divine regardlessness of their neglect of Him. We love men so long as they make some return of that love. But God loves men because they *need* love. We are kind to those who show some gratitude and

appreciation. But "He is kind to the unthankful and the evil."

"Love suffereth long and *is kind.*" Mark that fine phrase "is kind." The beaten gold of a precious truth lies hidden in those two words. You know those test days which come into our lives. Everything seems awry, and atwist; everything going wrong. We go about the house with clenched teeth, set lips, and knit brows bearing our trials. We "suffer long." But we are anything but kind within. And yet just here lies the victory. For victory is not simply in our long suffering of burdens and trials, but the inner spirit of kindness which we persist in cherishing toward those who are causing us to suffer.

The Coveringness of Love

"Love beareth all things," that seventh verse reads. But the word literally is, "*covereth all things.*" What does that mean? Away down in the depths of the natural human heart is a tendency to uncover the frailties and foibles of our fellow man; "to the scorn and criticism of those who gaze in idle curiosity upon them. But *that* is not love. It is this deceitful heart of ours. What on the other hand does love do? Do you remember that story of the friends who brought the paralytic to Jesus? When they could not get near Him for the press, they took off the roof and let him down into the Lord's presence. this word "beareth" in the seventh verse, is the same Greek root as the word, "to take the roof off," only this word means, "to

put a roof over." And that is what love does. It puts a roof over, instead of taking the roof off the frailties and weaknesses of our fellowmen. *The greatest incentive to practice a Christ-like grace toward others is to remember how God has poured forth that same grace upon us.* That is a splendid rule here. Are you tempted to uncover the shortcomings of your fellows? Is censoriousness a besetting sin with you? And would you learn the secret of victory over it? It lies here. *The instant you are tempted to un-cover another's life remember how God in His grace has covered yours with the blood of Jesus Christ.* Think of the years of sin and rebellion; think of the wasted time and strength; think of the coldness and lovelessness when the heart should have been warm with love; think of the sins of omission and commission; think of all your unfaithfulness, waywardness and selfishness. And then consider how quickly God has covered all these sins! As you remember how guilty past you will be ashamed of the un-Christ-like spirit which uncovers instead of covers. Your heart will come to cherish that tender word of the great apostle, "Be ye kind and tender-hearted, forgiving one another, *even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you.*" God is asking you to have not the malice which uncovers, but the love which covers the frailties of others. Be not of those who take the roof off, but of those who put the roof over the weaknesses of your fellows.

The Practicalness of Love

"Little children, let us love in *deed* and in *truth*." (I John 3:18). What does John mean? If you and I were drawing the picture of love the first and natural thought with us would be the emotion of love, the tender sentiment of love in the heart, the feeling of love that is there. Now, not for one moment would I disparage the conscious glow and zeal, the ardor of love in the heart. But I am glad that when God comes to give us a test of love it is something so *practical* and so simple. For God does not anywhere in this wonderful chapter make emotional consciousness the test of love, but definitely says that we are to love in *deed*. What does He mean? this: Love is doing; it is serving; it is helping; it is ministering. The test of love is not the glow of love in our hearts, but the deeds of love in our lives. "He that keepeth my commandment, *he* it is that loveth me." "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee." "Well, Peter, love consists not in your ardent protestations; not in your transient feelings. There is something else, Peter, do you love me? *Do* something. Feed My sheep. Prove it in your life; in your acts."

Now, that is a precious thought and for this reason. We are not all high-keyed along emotional lines. We do not all have the intense, inner consciousness of love that a man like the apostle Paul had. Some of us are work-a-day, practical men and women, who live our daily life in the will of God, and in daily faithfulness, not always with special experience of the inner passion of love. How comforting to know that

if our daily life is unselfish and helpful, and we are living it for God and others as best we know, then we are living this blessed love-life as surely as the man who is more constantly sensible of the inner burnings of love in his soul. Wherefore if when we sing "More love to Thee, O Christ," we grow discouraged at the seeming lack of it, let us remember that the final test of love is not how we feel, but how we live. And that explains the teaching of love for our enemies. One says, "How can I do that?" "I do not feel that love toward them which I have toward my dear ones." The Lord does not expect it. The test here is the same test of deeds. If he were hungry would you feed him? If he were thirsty would you give him drink? If he were drowning would you throw him a line? Certainly you would. You love Jesus Christ too much for anything else. Well, that is the test of love to enemies. Jesus Himself says so, and we can live that love-life toward any man even though he be one who declares himself our foe.

The Suffering of Love.

As said before, if you and I were drawing this picture we would think about the ardor, the glow, the sentiment of love in the heart. But the very climax of love is what it will *suffer*. When you think of the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, what do you think most perfectly voices it? Is it His words as a teacher, wonderful as they are? Is it His deeds of love and mercy, gracious as they were? Is it His tender

compassion in that wonderful scene of weeping over Jerusalem, wondrous as the emotion of it was? Nay, it is not in these. When you want to see the highest love of Jesus Christ you picture Gethsemane, the hall of scourging, or the dark hill where he hung between a compassionate heaven and an uncompassionate earth. The picture of Jesus Christ, which melts our hearts tonight in love, is the picture of what He suffered for us. The highest proof of love is suffering. Therefore a man or woman may live on the loftiest plane of the love-life, and yet not always have the conscious *feeling* of love accompanying it. May I prove it? There never was a time in the life of our Lord when when He had less of the *feeling* of love than when He hung on the cross. Why? Because that was a time when hanging there as a substitute for you and me, as a sin offering, God, Himself, must needs turn away His face and the overmastering emotion of Christ's heart was expressed in that cry: "My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken Me?" Despair and agony were the emotions that occupied and overmastered the heart of Jesus Christ at that moment. There was never a time when He had less of the emotion of love. *Yet there never was a time when He loved us more!* Even so some of you are bearing for the Master's sake, burdens of weary toil; sorrows and sins of others; censure and misrepresentation; bitter estrangements; cherished hopes deferred for weary years; patient faith which has not yet issued into sight—you, I say who are bearing these without any special consciousness or

feeling of love, are yet living the highest form of love a man or woman can live for Jesus Christ. For the highest expression of love is suffering. And he who brings to his Master the scars of his suffering for His name, and His kingdom, lays at His feet the loftiest tribute, even as it is the costliest sacrifice, which love can bring to the master of his heart. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life," that a man suffer, for this Friend.

The All-Suffering of Love.

"Love is the fulfilling of the law." They say there are thirty thousand promises in the Book. I suppose there are nearly as many commands and precepts. Perhaps you are tempted to say: "Then I can never keep God's law and live in His will. If God would only have some simple rule of the Christian life that would fulfill everything!" Well, God has. "Love is the fulfilling of the law." If you love a man you will not murder him; you will not covet his goods; you will not bear false witness against him; if you love a man you are fulfilling—you are *filling full* the law. Some of you are husbands and fathers. If the legislature should pass a hundred statutes concerning the care of your wives and children, you men would not only do all the legislators enact, but you would do a thousand things they never would think of putting on the statute books. Why? Because you *love* your wife and children. You would not only keep the law, but you would *fill full*

the law to overflowing. Now, that is God's simple rule of life for you and me. As we come to the twilight of this day, as we sit down in the evening hour to meditate over it, we do not have to think of all the commandments that are in The Book. We simply say to ourselves, "The words that I spoke this day, were they in love? The deeds that I did, were they in love? All I have done this day, can I lay God's straight edge of love along side of it?" How simple that makes the Christian life! For the man or woman who lives that simple law of love is fulfilling God's great purpose in this life.

I must be practical as I close, for someone is saying, "Can we ever have such love; is it possible to gain such love?" Let us note, in answer three thoughts about the *obtainment* of love.

Love is a Goal.

"Follow after love," says the great apostle. Make it your goal. Make it the pursuit and passion of your life. Mark its dizzy height—"the greatest of all." It is the pinnacle of all Christian grace. It is the charm, the crown of all Christian character. It is the very nature, the very life of God Himself within you. For, "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." Set it ever before you then as your goal. Think much upon it. Pray for it. Be jealous of all that dims or hinders it. Bridle the haste of your tongue. Banish the unkindness from your voice. Curb the injustice of your judgements. Frown upon criticism of others. Flee harshness and unlov-

ingness as you would heinous sins of the flesh. Be not disheartened in your seeking. That which the golden crown and jewel of all character is worth the patient, continuous seeking which these words "follow after" hint at. And then remember too:—

Love is a Fruit.

"*The fruit of the Spirit is love.*" There hangs a peach. Note its gorgeous coloring. Mark its ripened lusciousness. But have you thought how long it took God to ripen that peach? There was a planted seed. It burst, and from it came the seedling tree. It grew apace until in time came the first blossom, and then the tiny fruit, and then the wind, the sunshine, the showers, and the ripening, until there hangs the luscious peach. It took God a long while to make that fruit. Even so love is *the fruit* of the Spirit. Be patient with yourself as to this matchless fruitage of the Spirit. It takes time for God to make us bear a ripened fruit in our hearts and live; and love is such a fruit. Again:—

Love is of the Spirit.

"*The fruit of the Spirit is love.*" My natural heart does not love. That is, it does not love God. It does not love lost men. It does not love the world that lies in darkness tonight. It loves the baubles, the prizes, and the pleasures of this world. Nor does it matter how hard I *try* to love God and the things of God I cannot *make* my natural heart do it. Can you? Have

you and I not failed, oh, so often here? But now if God could only take the *spirit of a lover*, and put it into your heart, and mine, we would love. Because a lover loves without trying. He loves instinctively, spontaneously, out-flowingly, and this is just what God did when He begot us in Christ Jesus. "Because ye are sons God hath sent forth the spirit of His Son into your hearts." He put into our hearts the spirit of Jesus Christ Himself. And would you know then the secret of fullness of love? It is simply the secret of the Spirit. Believe in the Spirit's indwelling; yield to the Spirit; pray in the Spirit; walk in the Spirit; serve in the Spirit—yea, learn to live in the Spirit. For all you do to foster and cherish His life within you will bring you richness and fullness of the blessed love-life. And all that chills and grieves Him in your daily life will surely dim and quench the love within which is the fruit He is seeking day by day to ripen and develop in your innermost soul.

The Eternalness of Love.

"Love never faileth."

Faith shall pass away because it shall at last climax in sight. Hope shall cease. For what a man seeth doth he yet hope for? Knowledge itself—or rather the gift—"shall vanish away." For "now we see through a glass darkly." We are like men looking at the sun through a bit of smoked glass. When, face to face, we behold the splendor of the Sun of Righteousness we will throw away the clouded glass. Yea, and

our knowledge without love "profiteth nothing." For the humblest washwoman who lives the love-life for God will find up there a priceless and imperishable inheritance, while the most learned sage though he has a wealth of knowledge, yet knows not love, will find himself stripped of his assets, a bankrupt in the court of God. So then all these gifts will pass away. But there is one treasure every fragment of which laid up down here reaches over into, and abides through the endless ages of eternity. And that is love.

You may sit all alone in the great Dresden gallery, in an isolated room dedicated wholly to one great painting, the Sistine Madonna. You may gaze for hours upon its wondrous picture of tender, majestic motherhood. Yet when Raphael's masterpiece has faded into oblivion the cup of cold water you yesterday gave in the love of your Lord will live forever. You may stand in a single famous chamber in the Vatican gallery where there are four of the world's greatest masterpieces of sculpture. Men call it the most priceless centre of art in the world. Yet when Laocoon, with all its writhing agony, and the Apollo Belvidere, the most faultless carving of the human form in existence, have crumbled into dust, and even the names of their creators have been forgotten, then that humble deed of love you did today, unseen by any eye save that of God, shall abide forever. Yea, when all the waves of human fame, human applause and human flattery have died away upon the sands of time, the tiny wave of love you started in some

kind word, some loving ministry, will be rolling and breaking upon the shores of eternity. Every song that floats from your lips in the spirit of love; every word of comfort to the sorrowing; every loving warning and admonition to the wayward; every prayer that goes up out of the love of your heart for a friend in need; every word of cheer and solace to the despondent one; every bit of suffering from criticism and misrepresentation borne in the spirit of love; every mite of silver and gold given for the love of the Master and His suppering ones—every such deed of love, however insignificant it may seem to you, will meet you at the throne of reward, and go with you in your shining train of influence and love all through the countless milleniums of eternity. And does there come a time when your voice of love is silent, your hand of love motionless, your human heart of love no longer throbs, and men say, "He is dead?" Then shall come a voice from heaven saying, "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord...*for their works do follow them.*" Would you build not for time but for a deathless eternity? Then build in love, upon the foundation of Christ Jesus. For so doing you build not that "wood, hay and stubble," which consume away in the searching fires of God's great test day, but that "gold, silver and precious stones," which shall only shine forth in greater preciousness and splendor in that same day of revelation of all things.