

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” (Jn 13:34)

We are in the final days of 2025. It has been a year of God’s hope. God has planted a living hope in his kingdom in his people all over the world. Just several days ago, we visited Nairobi, Kenya to attend the African Directors Conference. There, we met our beloved Missionary Stephanie Bekit and her family. In October, she suffered from pneumonia and was quite sick. By God’s grace and the help of Dr. Sarah Won, she recovered. The time of suffering refined her hope in the kingdom of God. She and Natan are now serving in Kenya UBF more joyfully than before, while they also teach at West Nairobi School. Surely, our God is alive! The living God gives us living hope.

As I prayed for the new year, one word came clearly to my heart from John 13:34: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." How many times have we heard these words, "Love one another"? We all know we should do this. But do we actually love one another as we should? Over the last 35 years I officiated many wedding ceremonies and delivered wedding addresses. Sometimes my wife said to me, "You spoke well about love today. But you need to improve in practice." And she gave me several facts and details to prove her point. It is a humbling experience. Talking about love is not so difficult. But loving practically can be hard. So I hesitated to speak on this passage. Yet, the Lord gave me this word for the new year. So may he help me and all of us to love one another. Let’s think about this passage with three questions in mind: 1) What does Jesus mean by “a new command”? 2) How can we love one another? 3) What is the impact of loving one another?

First, what does Jesus mean by “a new command”? In verse 34a Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love one another.” Jesus gave a “command” in the same way that the Father God gave the Law to Moses. It means Jesus has the same authority as the Father God. Jesus’ words are not suggestions or advice, but God’s command. To have a right relationship with Jesus, we must obey Jesus’ command; we must love one another. Though Jesus strongly emphasizes obedience, its source is not mere human effort. In using the word “new,” Jesus essentially

contrasts the “new command” with the “old covenant.” The old covenant was based on obedience to the Law: “Do this and you will live” (Lk 10:28). It required 100% fulfillment of the Law from the age of accountability to death. No one ever kept that law perfectly except Jesus. Jesus alone lived a sinless life and obeyed the will of God fully without fault. Then he offered his life to the Father God as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. The Holy Son of God, the sinless Son of Man, died for our sins. The Father accepted his sacrifice, raised Jesus from the dead, and established a new covenant with mankind.

Jesus activated this new covenant at the Last Supper. Jesus said, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt 26:28). Anyone who accepts Jesus’ shed blood by faith receives forgiveness of sins and becomes a child of God. So now we are children of God through faith in Jesus. We receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works within us to put to death our sinful nature and empower us to live a new life. So the essence of the new command is different from the old covenant. The new command is based on God’s grace—what Jesus has done for us. It is carried out by God’s power—the Holy Spirit. As we receive Jesus’ grace and live by the Spirit, we can love God and others. It is on this basis that Jesus commands his disciples to love one another. To paraphrase St. Augustine: “God commands what we are unable to do by ourselves, but he does not command us to do what we cannot do; rather, he commands us to do what we can do, for he enables us to do it.” How do you feel when you hear the words “command” and “obey”? Some of us may have an allergic reaction. Perhaps we have been exploited. Most likely, these words have aroused our rebellious sinful nature. However, as we remember how Christ has loved us, we find that his command is not burdensome. It reflects his sacrificial love for us. It sets us free and enables us to live happy, joyful lives. Let’s change our mindset toward the words “obey” and “command.” Let’s obey Jesus’ new command by faith!

Second, how can we love one another? Verse 34b says, “As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” The words “As I have loved you,” remind us how Jesus has loved us: sacrificially, unconditionally, and with steadfast love. In John 13:1-17, Jesus demonstrated his love and set an example. We learn from Jesus how to practice his love. First of all, we need the mindset of Christ Jesus. In the first verses, John emphasizes what was on Jesus’ mind. It was just before the Passover Festival. This Passover was unique. The hour had come for Jesus to die for the sins of the world, and he knew this. At the thought of impending death, anyone would be overwhelmed with anxiety, sorrow, and fear. But not Jesus. Jesus thought of

returning to the Father God. Verse 1b says, “Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father.” Jesus knew his death was an entry into the Father God’s presence. After suffering and death, his Father would raise him from the dead; he would enjoy eternal glory with the Father. This thought filled his mind. Jesus was also full of love for his disciples. Verse 1c says, “Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” His love flowed irresistibly like a mighty river. With this love he was ready to sacrifice himself for his disciples. He fully embraced them; he wanted to express his unfailing love one last time.

The occasion was the evening meal. All of Jesus’ disciples were there, reclining at the table, in a private upper room. How wonderful it would be to sing hymns, share beautiful memories, and express love toward one another. Maybe they could have a talent show and laugh a lot with each other. However, this meal was not like a picnic; it was a spiritual battle. The devil was howling in Judas’ ear, destroying any last bit of resistance, to compel his betrayal of Jesus. The devil was like a suicide bomber who wanted to destroy Jesus and his disciples. How could Jesus practice God’s love in such an environment? Verse 3 says, “Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God.” Jesus knew that the Father had given him all authority in heaven and on earth. He knew the Father trusted him to carry out his world salvation plan to save people from sin and death. He trusted his Father God, who is almighty and good all the time. With this mindset, he had peace and freedom.

Last year, I met Petra Lee, missionary to Zimbabwe. She testified how Jesus helped her. One day she received serious news: she had cancer. At the moment of diagnosis, the Lord said, “I am with you always...” She was sure of his presence and protection. She had real peace. Instead of being overwhelmed by sorrow, anxiety and fear, she could share Jesus’ love with her family members, coworkers and friends. And by the grace of God, her treatment has been successful and she is recovering. When we share Jesus’ mindset, we have peace. We may live in the eye of the storm; problems and challenges may swirl around us; but we have peace. We are free. We can serve God joyfully. Let’s learn Jesus’ mindset!

At this time, what did Jesus do? Jesus demonstrated his love for his disciples. Many people think that love is a feeling, and as feelings change so love changes. Jesus’ disciples had changed; their initial loyalty was marred by weakness

of character and sin. Jesus knew that one of them would betray him, another would deny knowing him, and all of them would desert him. Such people are not lovable at all. But Jesus loved them “to the end” despite their weaknesses and failures. Jesus loved them, based not on their condition or merit, but from his very nature (1Jn 4:8). He is the source of love. The power of his love is irresistible—it is the most powerful force in the universe. By loving his disciples to the end, he demonstrated God’s love.

Then, what is love? The Apostle Paul. Paul wrote: “Love is patient; love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others; it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres” (1Co 13:4-7). The first trait Paul mentions is “patient.” Why “patience” first? Patience is at the foundation of love. Patience is not an emotional feeling. It is the inner strength to bear with others’ weaknesses and failures in hope. We can bear with others for a while, but to be patient to the end is not easy. One medical missionary to Africa suffered unbearably. He had to watch his patients die from AIDS because there was no medicine to heal them. He himself was exposed by touching a contaminated needle. He saw a fellow Korean shot dead just a day after buying shoes from him. He was separated from his beloved wife. His daughter became sick with severe and prolonged meningitis. One day it became too much for him and he decided to give up his missionary life. Before doing so, he wanted to have one last Bible study with his sheep. During that Bible study God moved his heart with Jesus’ love. With many tears, he remained in Africa. Now a vibrant UBF chapter has grown there. A native shepherd was just raised as the leader. This helps us understand Jesus’ love; it is patient; it always perseveres; it is to the end. Jesus’ love never fails. With his love, we can love one another to the end, carrying out God’s mission together.

How did Jesus express his love to his disciples? He got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist (4). 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 (5). Washing someone’s feet was a most menial job in the ancient world. But Jesus became such a servant. It is really remarkable. Many people say, “I love you” with their emotions. But when practical service is needed, they disappear. However, Jesus shows us that love is to serve in a most menial, practical way. One famous saint said, “Not all of us can do great

things. But we can do small things with great love.” Indeed, small acts of service, done with great love in a time of need, express God’s love and are very powerful.

We can imagine how the disciples might have thought about this event as the years went by. Jesus, the Son of God, humbly washed their dirty feet and dried them off. The Creator of heaven and earth bowed before each one of them and served them in the most humble way. They could realize how important they were to God. They could feel honored by God himself. How precious this memory must have been when they were dishonored by people of the world. Jesus left a lasting impression of true, deep love with his disciples.

However, as we see in verses 6-10, we must learn how to receive Jesus’ love. Simon Peter first shows us a negative example. He said to Jesus, “You shall never wash my feet” (6-8). Why? Peter did not want to expose his dirty feet to Jesus. He thought he should wash his own feet. He wanted to be clean by his own effort. It is self-righteousness. In addition, Peter thought the master should not serve those under him in such a humble way. If his master Jesus served others, Peter would also have to serve. It was against the social hierarchy in Peter’s mind. He could not accept Jesus’ love because he had his own idea. Peter rejected Jesus’ word. His mind needed to change to receive Jesus’ blessing.

Jesus knew how to help Peter. He said, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me” (8b). Jesus declared that he must wash Peter’s feet. It was essential in order to continue their relationship. A relationship with Jesus is rooted in his grace of humble service. His grace defines the relationship. Spiritually speaking, our dirty feet are our dirty sins. Jesus’ washing comes through his blood shed at the cross. We must expose our dirty sins of pride, selfishness, lust, jealousy, anger, resentment, bitterness, greed and the like. When we do, Jesus cleanses us with his precious blood. This establishes our relationship with him. We need to be saved by Jesus. Jesus is the Savior; we are sinners. His saving grace establishes our love relationship. His grace is a fountain of love. Our love is weak; it fails. But when we receive Jesus’ love, we can love others with his love.

In verses 12-17, Jesus explains why he set an example. As Teacher and Lord, Jesus washed their dirty feet so that they might wash one another’s feet. Jesus’ action was inscribed in their minds so deeply that John could write this account in detail decades later. They were witnesses of Jesus’ incredible act of service. But

being a witness was not enough. Jesus said, “Now that you know these things you will be blessed if you do them” (17). Jesus wants us to not just talk about it, but to practice his humble, loving servanthip. Let’s practice Jesus’ words.

Though Jesus’ love was so gracious, humble and patient, it was also based on truth. The truth is that all people are sinners and only Jesus can save us. The truth is also that God loves all people with unfailing love, but will never compromise with man’s sin. Jesus revealed this love and truth for his disciples, for all mankind, and even for Judas Iscariot. In verses 18-30 Jesus foretold his betrayal. In doing so, he revealed the fulfillment of Scripture and foreknowledge of people’s destiny (18). Foretelling his betrayal resulted in his disciples believing that Jesus is God (19). Later, they would testify to others, and based on their gospel preaching, many would come to God, become his children and receive salvation (21). Jesus offered his salvation to Judas when he gave him bread dipped in the dish. It represented Jesus’ body and blood shed for Judas’ sins. Though Judas took the bread, he did not repent. Jesus loved Judas enough to die for him, knowing that Judas was the betrayer. But Judas did not accept Jesus’ love and saving grace. He went out from Jesus’ presence into the darkness. Later Jesus said he was doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled (17:12).

Into the darkness of the night, Jesus spoke the light of God’s truth. He said, “Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once” (31-32). Jesus used the word “glorify” five times in these verses. On the eve of his death, Jesus saw his own eternal glory and the glory of God the Father. How was Jesus’ glory revealed? Jesus was in the process of doing something that no mere man can do. He submitted to the will of God to die on a cross with absolute obedience. He willingly offered himself to God as our Savior. He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him. Through Jesus’ obedience, God’s glory was revealed. God’s love is greater than the devil’s hatred. God’s saving grace is more powerful than sin and death. God’s goodness is mightier than evil. God is the Sovereign Ruler who fulfills his salvation plan without fail. As God was glorified in Jesus through his death, God would raise Jesus from the dead as King of kings and Lord of lords, the everlasting Victor. This gospel truth is the root of Jesus’ love.

In this passage, Jesus teaches us to love one another practically as he has loved us. He wants us to establish a loving community based on truth. However,

there are elements that threaten such a community: selfishness and greed like that of Judas, self-righteousness like that of Peter, and indifference like that of the other disciples. When these elements fester in our hearts, factions and divisions arise. People begin to hurt each other. They dishonor one another, blame one another, hate, judge and condemn each other. It is the devil's work to destroy the Christian community. We must fight against the devil's work to build a loving spiritual community. Let's repent of our selfishness, greed, self-righteousness, and indifference. Let's repent any such sins and attitudes of the heart. Let's learn the mind of Christ, receive his love, and form a loving community. Let's love one another as Jesus has commanded us.

Third, what is the impact? 13:35 says, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Love is the mark of a good disciple of Jesus. Jesus' disciples are not recognized by their cleverness or achievement, but by love. When we truly love one another, people see Jesus. This love has a profound impact on our communities and in the world. This love should be evident in our homes, as husbands and wives love one another as Christ has loved us. There are many UBF house churches in which the love of husband and wife shines like a bright star in their mission field. In North Macedonia there is Barnabas and Petra Kang. Just a little over a year ago, Barnabas was in Asan Hospital in Korea with a serious kidney problem. He looked so weak that Petra took many videos of him, thinking they may be his last words. But as God's people began to pray, he began to recover little by little. When I visited him in September of 2024, we agreed to meet again in North Macedonia last spring. Amazingly, he was at the airport to meet us. A few weeks ago, he ran a 5k race and finished to the end. Through this time of illness, their faith deepened and matured. Petra sang, "Jesus is my hiding place," and worshiped the Lord with all her heart. God blessed their family and their ministry. As a sign of this blessing, we baptized their daughter Anna and a beautiful young Macedonian lady, "Sanja" on our last visit. This family has become a blessing to North Macedonia, to Europe and to the world. On the other hand, some families are a work in progress. Some husbands and wives are still self-centered, and do not love their spouses with Christ's love. Their home is not as nurturing as it should be. Their children and Bible students can become discouraged by the lack of love at home. We must pray for our house churches to practice the love of Christ and reveal the love of Christ. This is one of the most important ways to testify that Christ lives in a world of broken families.

Healthy families are the foundation of a vibrant, sustainable church. When leaders in a church community love one another, there is harmony in their ministry and the Holy Spirit works with power. In Japan, there is M. Daniel and Maria Jeong and M. John and Sarah Kim. They were sent out from Kwangju 36 years ago. Since that time they have loved one another. They never fought even once. So I asked for their secret. They said, "Christ is our center. We respect each other's boundaries." Daniel's son Samuel married John's daughter Sarah. They are really happy. They serve the next generation in Japan, who are growing as healthy and happy followers of Christ. On the other hand, there are some chapters in which conflicts among leaders discourage young members. This is a serious matter. It is vital that leaders love one another. Then young people will see Christ's love through them and follow their example. It sounds simple to say: "love one another." But in practice there are many challenges in doing so. We must grow in the character of Christ--in his humility, forgiving love, forbearing grace, patient endurance, undying hope, and more. We must also grow in understanding others. We must learn to overcome generational barriers and communicate love effectively. We must overcome cultural differences and love one another from heart to heart. The most important thing we can do to please God and to establish future generations is to love one another.

May we all experience a new filling of God's love in our hearts. When the love of God burns in our hearts for Christ and one another, we become one. We become strong together. There are many hardships and challenges facing us: the struggle to be self-supporting, the threat of outside forces, resistance in students' hearts, family problems, and more. However, when we love one another with the love of Christ, his love will burn like a great fire to destroy all barriers and challenges. We will reveal Jesus to the world. We will overcome the world and render glory to God. When we love one another, we are so richly blessed. We have true joy in our hearts. We enjoy real peace. We experience the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23a). Jesus' love heals our wounds and restores our relationships. Personally, I pray to learn the humble, life-giving love of Jesus more deeply in 2026. I repent for not loving my family members, close coworkers and all leaders in our ministry as Christ has loved me. By faith in God's love I pray that 2026 may be the year of growing in Jesus' love. A united and loving community is a powerful testimony to the world. When we love one another and pray together, the gospel advances in our homes, work places, campuses, communities and the world. Let's love one another as Jesus has loved us.