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#75

## “Known by Love” John 13:31-38

### Introduction

Reputations are an important thing. Reputations are definitions of your name. When people hear your name, what do they think? If I say, Bill Clinton, what do you think? If I say, John Calvin or Jonathan Edwards, what flashes in your mind? What about Johann Sebastian Bach or Babe Ruth or George Patton? Each of those names conjures up certain thoughts, impressions and emotions. Institutions have reputations too. When you think of Purdue University certain things come to your mind. When you think of Indiana University decidedly different things appear. The Mayo Clinic means certain things to people. Capital Hill, the Gestapo, Disney World or Bermuda Triangle – they all have reputations. Proverbs 22:1 says *a good name is to be more desired than great wealth, Favor is better than silver and gold.*

What do people think of when they think about Christians? We know what the media thinks because they write often enough about us. With them our reputation is often *narrow, radical, close minded, extreme, judgmental, and proud.* And in one sense we join good company for the Pharisees thought many of the same things about Jesus in His day.

But, perhaps more importantly, what does your neighbor think of you? How are you known at work and in your community? When people hear the name, Reformed Presbyterian Church of

Lafayette, I wonder what they think. In our text today we are going to see that the name, the identifying mark, the reputation of the disciples of Jesus Christ is somehow be connected to their love for one another. Everyone loves the idea of love, but in Christ we find out what real love is really like, and therefore what we are to be like. And we find that it is a standard and calling that cannot be attained apart from Christ living in us. We are to be known by our love for one another.

### [John 13:31-38]

It's been a couple of weeks since we've been in our study in John, so we need to remember the context for the verses that are before us this morning. Jesus is reclining at the table with His disciples serving them the Lord's Supper. In a very moving display of His deep love for the disciples, Jesus laid aside His outer garment and washed the disciple's feet. Judas was dismissed from their presence to fulfill the evil desires of his heart. Jesus then reflected upon the love and intimacy between Himself and His heavenly Father as He tells the disciples again that He is leaving them.

We should not lightly dismiss this announcement of His departure and the disciple's *non* departure. Jesus is well aware that as He is love. And that His love for the world – in the physical, visible way they have seen it in the last three years, is about to be removed. And because of that very fact, He commands the disciple's to love one another the way He has loved them *in order that* the world might continue to see His love.

And so He says, *a new commandment I give to you, that you love one another . . .* One of the first questions everyone asks about this verse is *why*

does Jesus call this a new commandment? Before we answer that, let's first realize that there is a sense in which it is not a new commandment. (That's not to deny what Jesus says. It is a new commandment – but it is also an old commandment.) Leviticus 19:18 says *You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.* When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment He said the greatest is *to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength.* And the second is like it: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* So in spite of a couple of subtle changes – *neighbor* is now *one another* and *as yourself* is *as I have loved you*, the command is not a radically new command. So how is it that Jesus calls this a *new commandment*? The first thing we can notice is that the love spoken of by Jesus here is:

### I. It is a **Broader Love.**

Back in the Book of Leviticus where we find this commandment to love our neighbor there is a strong sense of nationality that surrounds this teaching. Chapter 18 references the defilement and evil practices and abominations of the men of land who were before you. The previous nation is rightly viewed as those deserving to be cut off from God. But the people of God are to love their neighbor who is identified as his *fellow country man, the son of his neighbor, his own people.*

And we see the working out of that kind of love in Jesus' day. The Jews hated the Romans who occupied their land; the Samaritans were avoided and despised; and Gentiles in general were considered dogs. And even thought God had never

taught the people to view the world that way, they none the less had come to it on their own.

One of the reasons Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan was to lay the ground work for a broader love – a fuller and more complete love. One of the reasons he saved the woman at the well and those in her city, was to teach a more godly love. And of course in the gospel we find the fullness of God's love for the world.

*Galatians 3:28 - There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

Ephesians 2, in the context in which we are told of the great love with which Christ loved us, also reminds us that *now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.* And from there tells of this beautiful relationship that is to be built up among the people of God.

So this new commandment is a broader commandment. And while the focus here is on loving our brothers and sisters in Christ, we would be remiss if we didn't remember that this marking of love is to be reflected in all of our dealings with people. We are to love the people in the church, our families, our neighbors and even our enemies.

## **II. It is An *Understood* Love.**

Jesus commanded that we love one another *even as I have loved you.* This is important because

it defines love for us. Love is not some vague, confusing, arbitrary things that is determined by our thoughts or feelings or impressions.

Most of you know that this love is the Greek *agapeo* – an unconditional, perfect love. It is a love that is not earned or deserved or won. It's not performance based. It's not on again off again. God is love and has loved us.

But again we are left to ask, how is this a new love? The answer is, it is *new* in so much as that now, in Christ Jesus we see this love – alive, active, explained, illustrated and demonstrated by all that He did. Remember John 1:18? *No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.* One of the many things that Jesus explains to us is the love of God.

Later in His life the Apostle John who wrote this gospel we are studying also wrote the letter we call First John. If I John is about anything, it is about expounding on this magnificent subject of love. It's almost as though John remembered this conversation in the upper room and this new commandment given by Jesus and decided to dedicate a whole letter to explaining it for us.

Listen to a couple of verses from the third chapter. *We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.*

There is love explained! Love is not *saying* that you have love – love is what you do. I've had the privilege of marrying a lot of young couples through the years and this idea of love is always at the heart of our premarital counseling. What does it look like? How is it lived? And it's especially

important for young men – soon to be young husbands – to grasp the depth of what Christ is asking of them. As you know, husbands are commanded, in much the same way we find ourselves being commanded here, to love their wives just as Christ loves the church. And so I always give these men the assignment to examine the Bible and find out how Christ loves the church. If that's their model, they better study it.

And so too, must we. *Love one another, even as I have loved you.* How has Christ loved you? How has He loved His church? If you can't answer that, how can you obey this command? Of course, if you know Jesus Christ, you do know how He's loved you. You've seen Him:

- meet your needs (feeding of 5,000)
- protect you from evil (rage of Pharisees)
- comfort you (parents)
- discipline you (Peter, Thomas, James/John)
- forgive you (Peter, lame man)
- heal you (how many)
- serve you (washed their feet)
- you've felt His compassion (sheep w/out a shepherd)
- you know He laid down His life for you.

This is not just a calling for husbands to their wives. This is your calling to those in this church. How much do you love your brothers and sisters in this family? It's not always an easy thing to do. We don't always agree on things. The longer we are together the more we know each others weaknesses and struggles. We can easily focus on the nagging things that bother us.

But the new commandment from Jesus is that you love one another as He has loved you. You are called to do more than say you love each other. You

are called to serve each other. To forgive each other. To bear each others burdens. To work together for the good of the Kingdom and the glory of Christ. And you are called to do it sacrificially. You are commanded to be willing to deny your own desires and preferences for the sake of love. You are called to lay down your lives for one another if need be.

You can't love that way from a distance. You can't love with that kind of radical love if you are not near each other. We are smaller group today than we were yesterday. New friendships and relationships and gospel partnerships need to be formed. We are bound together in the family of God. So let it be the joy of your life and the commitment of your heart to love one another as Christ has loved you.

1. It is a Broad Love
2. It is an Understood Love

### **III. It is a *Possible* Love**

It seems impossible. How can we love others like Jesus loves us? But He wouldn't command us to do it if it were impossible. Again, we find the answer explained by John in I John 4:7-13. Listen. *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide*

*in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.*

You can't love like this on your own. This is a supernatural love. But it's not an impossible love. Christ is in you. As you abide in Christ; as you more and more experience and recognize His love for you – you will more and more love others in the same way.

And when we love like Christ loves, the world can't help but notice. Because when we love like this, they see Jesus Christ. They see something they long for but haven't experienced. They see love covering a multitude of sins. They see needs being met. They see sacrifice without hidden agendas.

*By this all men will know that you are **My** disciples, if you have love for one another.* Will you strive to love each other in this way? This is your identify in Christ. This is to be your name, your reputation. May God help us love as He has loved us.