

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

Jesus' NEW Ethic

(John 13-15)

Study #5

Sermon Series: Jesus' Liberating NEW!

(the powerful uniquenesses to the way of Jesus)

Introduction: Loopholes...

Our word "loophole" was originally used to refer to a small hole built into the exterior wall of a castle through which an archer could shoot at enemies outside the wall.

On the other side of the wall, a skilled archer could conceivably shoot through this loophole (or "arrowslit") and take out the archer inside the wall.

That's what a loophole is. It is an inadequacy in a system that allows a clever person to avoid the purpose of the system.

Taxpayers work hard to find loopholes when filling out forms. Children are famous for finding loopholes and workarounds to defeat systems put in place by parents to control chores, bedtimes, screen time and other disagreeable rules.

(I googled "loopholes" this week and found some good ones - as in some very creative ways to avoid the intent of a given rule - but decided to not share them with you as I don't want to be the cause of anyone's descent into a life of near-crime.)

Fifteen hundred years after God had given the people of Israel the Mosaic Law, the Jews had become expert loophole-finders and had devised elaborate ways to "obey" without really obeying.

When Jesus showed up to usher OUT the system of the Mosaic Law, among the many other things He did was usher IN a "loophole-free" ethical system.

This morning, you and I are going to see the brilliant, simple, and much more demanding ethical system Jesus put in place that we who believe in Him are to follow.

I'm going to start off today with one statement Jesus made in His famous Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). Listen carefully and see if there isn't something about this statement that sounds a bit odd.

First things first... (Matthew 5:23-24)

The context of this statement is Jesus' raising the bar of the 6th Commandment from "**Don't commit murder**" to "*Don't call someone 'fool'; don't even get angry at your brother.*"

[Matthew 5:23] "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, [24] leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering."

The man in this scene is intent on worshipping. Worshipping God is a wonderful thing. It's paying attention to, nurturing a vertical relationship with Almighty God.

While there, he remembers that a brother has something against him.

Jesus doesn't say what we might have expected Him to say, "*First things first. Conclude your time in worship and then go reconcile with your brother.*"

Instead, He says, *“First things first. Go, take care of the horizontal relational fracture between you and your brother. Then, come back and worship.”*

Jesus certainly isn’t voting against worshiping God. But His statement may prompt questions in your mind.

I’m asking that you hold those questions for now. We’ll come back to them as we conclude this morning. (And don’t get angry with me that I’m not dealing with it now. Check out Matthew 5:22.)

Review...

We are four messages into this series of studies in Jesus’ Liberating NEW. And this morning is our wrap-up to the series.

We have seen just how new the Jesus Way is, we’ve been impressed by its worldwide focus, have watched it get adopted by the early church at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), and have explored some of how we who follow Jesus are to deal with the Old Testament.

In these messages I have attempted to show that the mission of Jesus was to establish a new covenant and a new community that would start a new movement.

In the last two week’s messages, I have been making the case that, in Jesus, we are not bound by the Mosaic Law’s commands.

Now, I understand Jesus to say that everything written in the Old Testament is true and inspired and God-breathed. Amen!

I also understand Him to say that the entire system of the Old Covenant established under Moses expired when He died, rose again, and ushered in His New Covenant.

If all of this is true, and the six hundred and some-odd commands found in the Old Testament are no longer in effect, a reasonable question emerges: How are we who follow Jesus to live?

To arrive at an answer to that question, we’ll turn now to the scene of Jesus’ last extended time with His disciples before He died.¹

Last Words (John 13-15)

Setting: Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)

This is what we refer to as “The Upper Room Discourse”. At the point we enter the scene, Jesus has washed the dirty feet of His twelve apostles. They have just finished the Passover meal and Judas has left to go to the Jewish rulers to betray Jesus.

The mood is sober. Jesus has one last shot at equipping His followers before He dies. Everything He has to say is crucial.

So, right after Judas’ departure, Jesus speaks to the remaining eleven and gives them what we now call His New Commandment.

Jesus’ One Command (John 13:34-35; 15:12-17)

The mark of Jesus’ DISCIPLE (John 13:34-35)

A command (John 13:34a)

[John 13:34a] A new commandment...

The first explanation of this I ever read was from Francis Schaeffer, the Christian philosopher/theologian to lost young people of the hippie generation, who ran a hostel in Switzerland called *L’Abri*.

Schaeffer wrote a pamphlet titled, “The Mark of the Christian” (1970), a call to live out this New Commandment. He noted that Jesus did not give a description of all Christians or a statement of fact about all who believe in Jesus. It is a command.

¹ Highlighting the importance of love in Jesus’ Upper Room Discourse is the fact that Greek words for “love” appear twelve times in John chapters 1-12 and in 18-21. They are used thirty-seven times in chapters 13-17. (six of these are in Jesus’ post-denial interview with Simon Peter on the beach. 21:15-17).

The command can be violated, ignored, or disobeyed. It is possible that we who are God's children might NOT carry out this command, even though it was given by Jesus Himself.

An exclusive "given by Jesus" command (John 13:34a)

[John 13:34a] A new commandment I give to you...

He considers that He has authority to give commands, which is pretty arrogant - unless He has the authority.

Which He does. Rising from the dead gave Him ALL authority. He can give commands.

A new command (John 13:34)

[John 13:34] A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

He claims to be the gold standard for love and called His followers to a whole new level of love beyond what they had previously known.

In Moses' Law, Jews were called to, ***[Leviticus 19:18]...love your neighbor as yourself.*** Jesus' disciples are to ***"love one another, even as I have loved you."***

This was a "new" commandment,² first, in terms of scope.

IN TERMS OF SCOPE

Jesus didn't issue his new command as an additional commandment to the existing list of commands found in the Law of Moses. It is a replacement for everything in that existing list.

² It was a new (Gr. *kainen*, fresh rather than different) commandment in that it was part of a New Covenant that Jesus would ratify with His blood (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25). Under that new covenant, God promised to enable His people to love by transforming their hearts and minds (Jer. 31:29-34).

Just like His new covenant fulfilled and replaced the old covenant, and just like His new worldwide *ekklesia* / church replaced, for this era, the nation of Israel, Jesus' New Commandment replaced the old commandments of the Mosaic Covenant.

This commandment is also new in terms of quality.

IN TERMS OF QUALITY

For three years the disciples had been with Jesus and had experienced His multi-faceted love.³

He had been tender with them and tough. He had been patient, kind, and brutally honest. He wasn't always "nice", and it wasn't always pleasant being with Jesus, but they always knew that He was for them. He was always loving.

He rebuked them when it was needed (***[Mark 9:19] "How long must I put up with you?!"***), encouraged them to keep following when the road got tough, and showed them what God was like.

He endured the hardship of the road and never demanded special treatment. He lived servant-leadership, having just washed their feet before the Passover meal.

And they had watched as He showered love on others.

As He gave them this New Commandment, they would have been remembering how He had cleansed lepers, befriended tax-collectors and prostitutes, given a Samaritan woman living water, and cast demons out of Jews and Gentiles alike.

³ The essence of love is to act for the benefit of another (***[1 Corinthians 13:5] love does not seek its own***). It is possible to distinguish between: (a) pleasant interactions that may be quite rooted in self-interest, and (b) interactions which are truly for the benefit of another, which may encompass a broad spectrum of behaviors, some not very pleasant. The presence (or absence) of love is most clearly seen in our response toward someone who wrongs us. As Jesus emphasized in the Sermon on the Mount, being nice to people who are nice to us is par for the human race. (***[Luke 6:27-28] "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."***) is Christlike love.

Jesus got down into the grime of human need. His love was a “rubber meets the road” kind of love.

As opposed to the current Jewish model, where the emphasis was on cleanliness, Jesus relished mixing it up with the unclean.

Old Covenant living involved separation from uncleanness. Jesus’ New Commandment requires dirty hands. In Jesus, dirty became the new holy.⁴

Jesus’ New Commandment tells us that our love for each other is to look just like His love.

And the devastating impact of what Jesus said next cannot be overstated.

The identifying mark of the Jesus follower (John 13:35)

[John 13:35] By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

He isn’t saying that someone can look at you and tell if you have eternal life or not, if you are saved or not, if you are justified before God or not. That is something internal and invisible.

But anybody can look at your life and tell if you are a Jesus-following disciple or not. If you are loving, you are; if you aren’t loving, you aren’t.

It is possible to be a Christian without showing Jesus’ love. But, if we expect outsiders to know that we are following Jesus, we have to show what fifty years ago, Francis Schaeffer called “the mark.”

Love is the permanent badge, the “sniff test” of discipleship. Love is the disciple’s ID. It was then. It still is.

Love identifies us as Jesus’ *followers*. It also identifies us as His *friends*.

The mark of Jesus’ FRIEND (John 15:12-17)

Love that is sacrificial

THE NEW COMMANDMENT. AGAIN. TWICE.

A bit later in the evening, Jesus returned to the theme of love and repeated Himself.

[15:12] “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you...[17] This I command you, that you love one another.”⁵

Here, He says two more times what He had previously said.⁶

And then He speaks NOT about how He loved them over the past few years. He previews to what He was about to do for them on the very next day.

GREATEST LOVE - LAY YOUR LIFE DOWN FOR FRIENDS

[15:13] Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.

Jesus suffered the most horrible form of mistreatment imaginable. His love is best seen there, in that once-and-for-all act of unconditional love when He gave Himself to die for your sins and mine.

He endured the horrors of the cross (physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual) willingly. He died that you and I might live.⁷

⁵ In these verses, Jesus’ love is referred to by the use of a Greek aorist tense (point in time - the cross), while the disciples’ love for each other is mentioned in the present tense (ongoing, continual action).

⁶ This command is given many more times in the New Testament, along with a few other “*one anothers*” that synch perfectly with “*love one another*”. See Rom. 12:10; Eph. 4:2-3, 32; Col. 3:13; 1 Pet. 1:22; 2:17; 3:8; 4:8, many verses in 1 John and elsewhere.

⁷ We Christians easily repeat the New Testament teaching that “God is love.” But we should not miss that this is a uniquely Christian idea. In no other religious system (at least none that I know of) is God described as “love” or as “loving.”

⁴ Stanley, Irresistible. p. 247.

We can understand why the Apostle John placed very little value on feelings of love, or on mushy sentimentality. He was more impressed by a love that costs blood, sweat, and tears because that's what he saw when he watched Jesus die.

And get this. In speaking to His disciples, Jesus did "*lay down His life for His friends.*" But He did way more than that. He died for His enemies as well as His friends! (See Matt. 5:43-47; Rom. 5:8-10)

Now for the hot-blooded logic of Jesus' words as they trickle down to us today.

JESUS' FRIENDS LOVE AS HE LOVED. SACRIFICIALLY.

[John 15:14] "You are My friends if you do what I command you.

His command is that we love one another as He has loved us. Sacrificially. He's calling us to a "*lay down our lives*" kind of love.

The day may come when I am asked to literally die for someone else. And if that day comes, I pray that I'll follow Jesus and give up my life for that "other."

Until that day comes, I am called to make a conscious decision to put others first, look out for their interests, and lay down my life in practical, day-to-day ways. So are you.

To love as Jesus loved is to love **sacrificially**.

It is for us to DO SOMETHING on behalf of another person, for their benefit. It is to act with the other guys' best interests in mind.

To love as Jesus loved is **costly**.

When we commit to love, we are giving up our rights to hold on to our emotional and energy reserves, our finances, and our time slots.

Love can take lots of different forms.

It can take the shape of a prayer or of a wrench that repairs a car or a faucet. Love can take the shape of a listening ear or a shoulder to cry on. Love will buy groceries, fix a dinner, or write a letter.

Jesus says that IF and only IF I follow that road, IF and only IF I obey that command, then I become His friend.

Love that builds relationship

The word "friend" is an elastic word, even as we use it today. We have *casual* and *close* and *best* friends.

All believers are God's friends at one level. But when we give our lives to live and to love as He wants us to, we become His friends at a profoundly deeper level.

Jesus proved to His disciples that He was their Friend when He laid His life down for them. He says that His disciples will prove to be His friends if they lay down their lives for others.

Catch that. The measure of our love for Jesus and our entrance into deep friendship with Jesus hinges on our love for others.

Imagine the scene. You have just taken your final breath after living a life of sacrificial, costly love. Jesus - your Savior - welcomes you into glory.

He walks you His Father's throneroom and says, "*Father, this is My friend, _____.*"

That's Jesus' New Commandment. One command: Love one another as He has loved us. But, on that last night with His disciples, He also spoke of His "*commandments*" (plural).

John was able to identify God as love because He saw love in the cross of Christ. Despite the horrors John saw in his day - and despite the horrors we see in our world today - the cross tells us that God is love.

Jesus' Multiple Commands (John 14:15, 21)

[14:15] "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments..."
[21] "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who love Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."

His commandments consist of everything we learn from Him

I believe that these "commandments" are all the other commands we have from Jesus that we find in the New Testament.

This would include His parables and explicit teachings and interaction with individuals and even miracles.⁸

The overarching theme of His every instruction occurs under the umbrella of love.

For instance

For instance, not everything in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is about human relationships. But when Jesus addresses how we are to be with each other, the theme is unmistakably love, directed at fellow Christ-followers AND at those who are not.

- The Beatitudes call us to gentleness, mercy, peacemaking, and returning good for evil when persecuted by outsiders.
- The call to be salt and light to the world invites us to love others with God's love.
- "An eye for an eye" turns into turning the other cheek, giving freely to the one who asks, and going the extra mile.
- Love your neighbor grows into "love and pray for your enemy."

Or how about the parable of the Good Samaritan, which we saw briefly last Sunday? It's so good. (You'll find it in Luke 10)

⁸ I do not think that Jesus' reference here has anything to do with the Mosaic Law as the whole point of Jesus' NEW was to replace the OLD with a higher, better, no loophole ethic.

Jesus was interacting with a lawyer who tried to trip Him up with a question about eternal life. The Lord turned the tables and asked the tripper-upper how he read Moses on this theme.

The answer was a straightforward, two-part answer: Love God (Deuteronomy 6) and love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19).

Jesus told him, **[Luke 10:28] "You have answered correctly; do this and you will live."** OK...

But the lawyer was feeling insecure, so he asked a question of Jesus, **[29] But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"**

And with that, Jesus launched into His most disorienting, paradigm-shifting, mind-bending parable of them all.⁹ In this parable, Jesus redefined "neighbor" for everybody, forever.

In the story, an innocent traveler was attacked by bandits on a deserted road and left to die in the ditch. Two Jewish religious leaders passed him by, not wanting to get their hands dirty.

But a third man stopped to render aid. He gave food and drink, bandaged the wounded man's injuries, gave him a lift to an inn, and paid for his lodging. And he was a hated Samaritan!

The lawyer who started the whole thing had to be appalled that Jesus turned the Samaritan into the story's hero. But that's what Jesus did, and the punchline of the parable is, "You, be the Samaritan."

If there had been any thought that there was a greater virtue than love, this parable ends it. If there has ever been any thought by any Christian that Jesus calls on us who follow Him to only love "one another", this parable destroys it.

The parable of the Good Samaritan says that we are to be loving. Period. To all people. Everywhere.

⁹ Stanley, Irresistible, p. 187.

Not just to our tribe or ethnicity or family or to fellow Jesus-followers. We are to be the people who love because we follow the One who loved.

When Francis Schaeffer (whom I mentioned earlier) wrote “The Mark of the Christian” he included a section on the Good Samaritan to protect anyone from thinking that Jesus was only calling Christians to love other Christians.

Schaeffer wrote, *“There is no place for exclusivity of love for only fellow-Christians. That is ugly.”* Amen.

Our love is to be as expansive as Jesus’ was, who died for His friends and for His enemies.

Specifically, we are to love the people God loves. And everybody is somebody God loves.

The Apostle John wrote, ***[1 John 2:2] He Himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.***¹⁰

To love others is to love God. Not because others are God, but because God has told us to love others and to obey Him is to love Him.

We find this theme of the primacy of love everywhere we look in the New Testament. But Paul says it one time so bluntly that I just have to call your attention to it.

Essential Words (Galatians 5:6)

[Galatians 5:6] For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.

¹⁰ Likewise, what we find in the parable of the Prodigal Son is a picture of an older brother who models small-hearted love and urges us to do better. And on and on we could go, finding evidence of Jesus’ love everywhere and of His longing that we would follow in His steps and be loving.

Circumcision meant a lot to first century Jews. It was real important as a sign of being serious about God. Paul says that in Jesus it means nothing - ***“faith working through love means everything.”***

To which we might be tempted to say, *“Everything? Really?”*

To which Paul would reply, *“Really. Everything.”*

Because...when we love the way Jesus calls us to love, we have taken care of living the way Jesus wants us to live.

Growing in Christ is all about love. Any model about what maturity in Jesus looks like that doesn’t zero in on love is wrong. The one undeniable marker of progress in a walk with God is love.

Knowledge is not the essence of spiritual maturity. Neither is leadership skill, or theological sophistication. It’s sacrificial, lay-down-your-life, forgive-your-enemies love.

Conclusion:

At the beginning this morning, I read what Jesus said about a man who was worshiping at God’s altar, but who had a brother who had something against him. Jesus said, *“Leave the offering at the altar, reconcile with your brother, then come back to worship.”*

If that sounded a bit odd earlier, having now seen how central love is in the Jesus scheme of things, it may not sound so odd now.

Putting it positively, Jesus’ thought is that we should take care of the horizontal before engaging in the vertical. More negatively, God isn’t all that interested in your worship if you’re not loving the people around you.

Love matters supremely. So many of the New Testament’s exhortations are based on Jesus’ love for us.

For instance, in Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus, alone, we hear him urging us to be kind, tender-hearted, forgiving, to walk in love, to have loving and respectful marriages, and to have God-honoring relationships at work solely based on how Jesus loves us.¹¹

Love was His way and love is His command.

So, with no attempt to cover all the bases and in no particular order, here as we close I'm going to get pretty practical and name a few arenas in which Jesus' command to love impacts everything.

- *Husbands*

The Apostle Peter tells me that if I am not living with Kathy in an understanding way and granting her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life (in other words, if I am not loving her), my prayers will be hindered. (1 Peter 3:7)

- *Freedoms*

One of the big issues the church has faced in every age is whether we should take full advantage of all the freedoms we have in Christ. Those in the early church wrestled with whether Christians should eat meat that had been sacrificed to pagan idols. Paul wrote that since idols are nothing, if you want to eat that meat, go ahead and eat. You're free to do so...unless eating would cause a weaker brother or a sister to stumble, in which case, don't eat.

He concludes his argument with this, **[1 Corinthians 8:13] Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.** Should you exercise the freedoms you have? It depends on whether you would hurt your brother or sister by doing so. Sounds like Jesus' New Commandment reasoning at work to me.

- *Convictions*

Another issue the church faced in the first century - and one that it faces in 2020 - had to do with Christians who hold differing opinions about important issues - things like observing certain days as special days or not; eating certain foods or not, attending church during a pandemic or not, etc.

Paul wrote, applying the Law of Love, that we are not to judge someone who has a different conviction on a matter where there is no *"Thus saith the Lord."* What a word for our time!

- *Sexual behavior*

Jesus addressed sexual behavior in His Sermon on the Mount when He raised the bar from *"Don't commit adultery"* to *"Don't look lustfully at a woman."*

The reason to not do so, of course, is because of the lack of love involved in sexualizing someone with whom we are not joined by the covenant of marriage. Jesus' New Commandment answers the question of pornography, extra-marital sex, and pre-marital sexual involvement.

We could go on. And if we did we would find that there is no moral or behavioral arena of life that does not fall under and that is not answered by Jesus' New Commandment.

Ushering OUT the Old Mosaic Covenant did not usher IN a life of license. Far from it. The New Commandment raises the bar of what is expected from a follower of Jesus to the nth degree by calling us to love.

Jesus' ethical "system" is way less complicated than the one it replaced, requiring us to ask in each situation we face:

"What is the loving thing to do?"

"How should I treat this person who is loved by God?"

"How can I show the person in front of me with the same love I have received in Jesus?"

Way less complicated and way more demanding. His is the loophole-free ethic of love.¹²

¹² Under the Mosaic Law, murder was out of bounds, but holding someone in contempt, hating someone, having nothing to do with them, etc.... was permissible. Not under Jesus' New Command.

¹¹ See Ephesians 4:32; 5:2; 5:24, 25, 29; 6:5, 6.