

Love for one another...implications to the church...

A series on Sanctification: part 6 (E. Radmacher)

The Upper Room Discourse (John 13:1-17:26) has been at times divided and studied as two or three different discourses by various scholars. In contrast to these theories, John's intention for the whole section to be read and understood as a single unit is evident in his use of a literary device called an "inclusion" or "inclusio".

The hallmark of an "inclusio" is where a passage opens and closes with the same or similar verse. It often sets the mood of a passage. As a literary device found in the Old Testament (i.e., Ps 8:1-9) it is used here by John like bookends to focus on Jesus' command to love one another (John 13:34-35 and John 15:8-10). This love is the key to proving ("so prove to be", John 15:8, NASB) their relationship to Him as His disciples and will in turn make them useful and fruitful to Him as His friends: love each other as I loved you so that all will know you are disciples of Me.

1. Study John 13:34-35. What is this "new" command?

Until the Upper Room, the disciples had selfish desires for greatness in the kingdom at the expense of each other (see Luke 22); they were not able to respond to even the humble task of washing each other's feet. And now the new commandment Jesus gives them is to love one another!

When Jesus calls His command "new," He does not imply by this that the command to love was not a part of the Mosaic Law. For the command to love is clearly expressed in Leviticus 19:18, "Love your neighbor as yourself," and was recognized earlier by Jesus in Matthew 22:39 as a foundational part of the Mosaic Law, second only to the command to love God. His use of "new" here "implies freshness, or the opposite of 'outworn' rather than simply 'recent' or 'different.'" (1) Though what Jesus is saying is not new per se, He is giving it a new depth of meaning as He relates it to positive actions rather than absence of malice, as was characteristic of the Mosaic requirements. (2) He has given love a new standard. In the Old Testament it was "as yourself." Now Jesus says, "As I loved you." The command has a new standard, namely, Jesus Himself. This love will be the key to the growth and success of the church.

Jesus' command reveals that He expects us to imitate Him. He does not just say to love one another, but that they are to do it "as I have loved you." (3) John has told us in the opening words of this Upper Room Discourse (John 13:1) that Jesus loves them without limit. Jesus also has just defined love in terms of His humble service by washing their feet, and soon, He would give the ultimate demonstration of His love in giving His life. Thus, the love Jesus calls for is active, practical, and visible, being expressed toward fellow believers in tangible ways.

This love commanded by Jesus is to such a kind that it convinces the world that we are His disciples. Two key things are seen in verse 35: 1) the means by which their status as His disciples would be proven, and 2) the possibility of failure. The possibility of failure is seen in His use of the Greek term for "if" which carries the sense, "it may or may not be true." (4) We can fail to love one another. Rearranging the sentence to reflect His emphasis, Jesus is saying, "If you have love for one another, by this love all will know that you are My disciples." Implied in this is, "But if you do not have love for one another, by your failure to love all will not know that you are My disciples."

2. Study John 15:10. How has Jesus set an example for us?

Having commanded His men to continue in His love, Jesus describes the condition of doing that very thing—obedience to His commands. He does this by saying two key things. First He conditions continuing in His love on their response of obedience. Second, He offers His own obedience to the Father as their model for how it works.

Love for one another...implications to the church...
A series on Sanctification: part 6 (E. Radmacher) (page 2)

Dillow correctly recognizes that the Christian who refuses to obey Christ "will apparently no longer remain in Christ's love." That is, they will not be able to EXPERIENCE His love when they are disobedient and consequently out of fellowship. He also notes, "This is true even though Paul has declared elsewhere that 'nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God'" in Romans 8:39. (5) Where Paul is describing a positional (justification) truth, Jesus is describing a conditional (sanctification) truth. Cook clarifies the most important issue in the debate over whether we are looking at justification or sanctification truths, whether we are defining regeneration or describing its outworking in the life of the believer. He says that:

"Our obeying Christ and thus abiding in Him is compared to the Son's obeying the Father and thus abiding in Him; the Son was already in the Father by virtue of His sonship, but the Son abided in the Father by obeying Him. We see, then, that just as Christ's abiding in the Father was the maintenance of personal fellowship with the Father, so our abiding in Christ is the maintenance of personal fellowship with Christ. Just as Christ's abiding in the Father was the continuous enjoyment of position that was His, so our abiding in Christ is the continuous enjoyment of the position that is ours." (6)

We find a parallel to this in the unconditional Abrahamic covenant of the Old Testament and the conditional enjoyment one of its provisions in the Mosaic covenant, namely occupation of the land of promise being conditioned on obedience. As a matter of fact, this is the whole issue of the argument of Hebrews and Paul's explanation in 1 Corinthians 10:11 that Israel's experience is given as an example to the Christian of his or her experience in sanctification.

3. Examine John 13:34-35 and 15:8-10. How does this work for discipleship? What type of procedures can be considered? Consult Romans 12:1-2, Hebrews 10:22-25, and 2 Corinthians 3:18 for additional thoughts.

In the crucial hinge verse between doctrinal and practical sections of Romans, Paul points out that the secret to "renewing the mind" is a process of metamorphosis which he spells out in 2 Corinthians. Hebrews 10 further elaborates this process:

We draw near to God on the basis of faith (the upward exercise of faith in the Christian). A Christian abides in Jesus by believing His promise that He will abide in him / her.

In drawing near, we are cleansed of our sin (1 John 1:9) on the basis of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. As the Christian responds to Jesus' revealed will to love other believers, the Holy Spirit brings to that person's mind Jesus' desire and enables obedience.

On the basis of our cleansing, we express our faith by a steadfast hope; we have a confident expectation of the future promised by God. As the Christian is influenced by the Spirit and seeks to obey Christ's commandment, he or she will begin to pray for those things which will make loving others possible.

This motivates us to encourage each other to strive for love and good works. This is Christians demonstrating a love for other Christians. The love and good works are not automatic products of our justification, but expressions of our faith which must be brought forth by us, and which we must encourage in other believers as well if we wish to see them manifest at all.

Love for one another...implications to the church...
A series on Sanctification: part 6 (E. Radmacher) (page 3)

The last phrase of 2 Corinthians 3:18 ties it all together by the Holy Spirit:

As the believer responds to Jesus' revealed will to love other believers, the Holy Spirit brings to that person's mind Jesus' desire and enables obedience. As the believer is influenced by the Spirit and seeks to obey Christ's commandment, he or she will begin to pray for those things which will make loving others possible. This in turn will result in "fruit" which glorifies God. The fruit will prove that the believer is indeed a disciple of Jesus. This proof will not be to God, but to the world that is watching him (Matt 5:16). Some commentators see fruit in terms of evangelism and say that fruit is saved souls. (7) Actually, in this evangelistic call to the apostles, Jesus is saying the method is "fruiting (loving)" one another.

The implication of this lesson for our churches cannot be understated. We will never really be successful in carrying out the great commission until we truly implement the great commandment of John 13:34-35. Or, in other words, one reason we are sorely hindered in our *outreach* of the world is the disobedience with respect to the *inreach* to Christians. Then, and only then, will we see the results that the first church saw in Acts 2 and 4.

When did you last help or encourage your pastor? Have you ever helped or encouraged a Christian of a different denomination? Have you ever helped or encouraged a Christian of a different culture or handicap?

"But it is mainly the deeds of a 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..." Tertullian, a church father writing, roughly a century after the book of John was written, about the church's practice of receiving gifts to help the destitute, elderly and others suffering for "nothing but their fidelity to Christ."

References:

1. Tenney, "John," in The Expositor's Bible Commentary, 142. Calvin (Commentary on the Gospel According to John, 2:75) sees Jesus calling the commandment "new" because "laws are more carefully observed at the commencement, but they gradually slip out of the remembrance of men, till at length they become obsolete." He feels that Jesus has called it new because He wants to be kept with the same enthusiasm as if it were just recently given (76). This is speculative interpretation by Calvin. Wescott (The Gospel According to St. John, 176) offers a better understanding of what Jesus meant. He says, "In this case the 'newness' of the commandment...must be sought in the newness of the motive and of the scope, inasmuch as the example of the self-sacrifice of Christ, begun in the Incarnation and consummated at His death, revealed to men new obligations of new powers."
2. F. F. Bruce, The Gospel of John, 294.
3. Wescott (The Gospel According to St. John, 198) considers the clause "as I have loved you" to be ambiguous and says that it "may express either the character or the ground of the love of Christians."
4. This is a Third Class conditional clause that does not assume the truth or untruth of the protasis, but does link the truthfulness of the apodosis to it. Thus, if the "if" clause is true, then what follows is true also. If the "if" clause proves false, then what follows does not happen.
5. Dillow, The Reign of the Servant Kings, 534.
6. Cook, The Theology of John, 134.
7. Various options have been proposed for what He meant, both here and in verse sixteen. The most common options are the fruit of the Spirit, such as Galatians 5:22-23 and the salvation of the lost (i.e., new believers / disciples). Less common options include the possibility that Jesus is looking back at Isaiah 5 and the issues of righteousness and justice, or that He is referring to the fruit of our lips, i.e., praise to God, as in Hebrews 13. Neither of these last two options appears to have any immediate textual support.

Love for one another...implications to the church...
A series on Sanctification: part 6 (E. Radmacher) (page 4)

The first option, that Jesus is referring to the fruit of the Spirit, is held by many Bible interpreters. F. F. Bruce (The Gospel of John, 310) is an example. "Receiving an answer to the prayer of faith appears to be one form of spiritual fruit-bearing... The 'fruit' of which this parable speaks is, in effect, likeness to Jesus (the same may be said of the nine-fold 'fruit of the Spirit' in Gal. 5:22 f.). Those who manifest such likeness show conclusively that they are truly disciples of his...the faith that leads to union with Christ is the faith that manifests itself in true discipleship, a discipleship of obedience, love and joy." The problem with this view is that its proponents are importing the idea of the fruit of the Spirit from Paul back to Christ, or John. They are ignoring John 13:34-35. Secondly, Jesus' description of this fruit as something that "remains" in verse sixteen indicates strongly that He is not discussing attitudes. Also, His focus on His choice of them as it relates to this fruit does not seem to fit the idea of attitudes, though they certainly had not had good attitudes that evening. Finally, when He says "much" fruit, would He be saying by this "many different character traits and attitudes" or "full manifestations of character traits"? The idea of "much" indicates something more measurable than attitudes. Rather, we must note the "they" of verse six and the "all" of 13:35. Loving one another, expressed in actions, is an attitude that has had its goal reached. It is something that can be seen.

The second major view of what Jesus means by "fruit" is people. Carson, Gruenler and Laney are representative of those who see salvation of the lost as the fruit to which Jesus refers. Carson and Gruenler sees it thus because they see conversion of the lost as the "mission" of the church to the world (Carson, The Gospel According to John, 111). Laney makes the connection because of the analogy of the vine. For them salvation of the lost fits the context better, especially in light of Jesus' prayer in chapter seventeen. Jesus has called them to be "fishers of men," and this is another way of repeating the same idea. He has earlier talked about them doing "greater works" than He. If we view those works in the area of evangelism, then this fits the picture well. This also fits better with what Jesus will say in verse sixteen. There two key terms, "go" and "remain," indicate an evangelistic mission more than attitudes or character traits. The problem with this second view is that it does not keep its focus in the immediate context. Further, the answer is not found in an "either-or" solution, but both. The fruit of loving one another was the method, additions to the Church was the product.

This article was adapted from The Disciplemaker: What Matters Most to Jesus by Gary Derickson and Earl Radmacher (Salem: Charis Press, ©2001) and used by permission from its authors. Drs. Derickson and Radmacher have offered to the Christian public, and scholar, a sorely needed study of John 13-17. It should correct much wrongheaded thinking about not only these particular passages of Scripture but certain teaching in the Christian community which confuses justification and sanctification, belief in Christ and being a disciple of Christ.

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