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Jesus' New Command

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Jesus' New Command

Day 17

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. (John 13:34)

Two years had passed since I'd prayed on my friend's living room carpet: "God, fix what is wrong with me. I want to love. Whatever it takes."

In those years, "Whatever it takes" had taken a lot—so much, that had I known what was entailed, I would not have prayed those words. My marriage of 24 years had ended in divorce. My oldest son, a brilliant student-athlete, had fallen into alcohol abuse, dropped out of Harvard, and ended up in a mental hospital. The grief was almost more than I could bear. All my attempts to maintain the shiny façade of my "good Christian" life (and "help" those around me maintain the façade as well) had come to a painful end. My self-inflicted, rule-based version of Christianity had failed.

I was broken and desperate ... when one Sunday I heard a freeing truth.

"What is the most important command that Jesus gives?" the visiting speaker began by asking. My pastor raised his hand: "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind' and 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matthew 22:37- 39). I would have responded similarly.

But the speaker opened his Bible and pointed out that these were *Old Covenant* commands. Jesus had spoken in answer to a question posed by a Pharisee, "Teacher which is the greatest commandment of the law?" (Matthew 22:36). And then, to make it extra clear that these were Old Covenant commands, Jesus had concluded by saying, "On these two commands hang *all the law and the prophets*" (Matthew 22:40).

God intends that we live with Him in love. But the purpose of the Old Covenant wasn't to get us back into loving relationship. Even before He gave the law through Moses, God knew that His commandments would be impossible to always obey.

Rather, the purpose of the law was to make it abundantly clear that people were incapable of keeping the commandments.

God's intent was that the law would help us realize that our best efforts are not enough. We need help. We need a Savior! "The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ" (Galatians 3:24).

Jesus brought a New Covenant with a new commandment to replace the Old Covenant with its Ten Commandments. On the night of the last supper, He took a cup of wine and shared it with the disciples saying, "This cup is the *new covenant* in My blood" (1 Corinthians 11:25). Then He gave one "new commandment" to go with the New Covenant. He said, "A *new* commandment I give to you, that you love one another; *as I have loved you*, that you also love one another."

Wow! A new commandment—a new way to love—made possible by Jesus! I could hardly believe what I was hearing.

Without realizing it, I had wrongly assumed that because I'd accepted Jesus, I was living in the New Covenant. Yet really, I'd been trying to meet the impossible demands of the Old Covenant.

But this new command was different. It wasn't about trying to love God and my neighbor out of my own strength. It was believing that Jesus loved me. Knowing God's great love for us allows us to love others. God Himself is the source of the love. Believing Jesus' love for us fulfills the command.

This was why I wasn't loving. Because I wasn't letting myself receive God's love (because I didn't feel worthy ... because I'd sinned so horribly), I had nothing to give away except a cheap imitation of "love" dressed in "good-Christian" façade.

Dear brother, dear sister, God didn't intend that Christianity be just another religion with impossible rules to obey. Trying to follow rules, do the right things, and love God and others in your own strength doesn't work. God is the source of the love you get to freely receive ... and freely give.

Ponder for a Moment

In what ways might you be trying to live in both the Old Covenant and the New Covenant at the same time?

What connection do you personally feel between knowing you are loved and loving others?