

As I Have Loved You (John 13:31-38)

Expository Lessons from the Gospel of John

I. Background for the Farewell Discourse

- a. As we resume in the text, it is Thursday night, the night before Jesus is to be crucified.
 - i. Jesus has had his Last Supper with the disciples, at which (we know from Matthew, Mark and Luke) He instituted the Lord's Supper with the bread and the cup.
 - ii. Jesus has just identified Judas as the one who will betray Him. After Judas takes the bread from Jesus, he departs into the night. (**John 13:30**)
- b. After dinner has ended and Judas has departed, but before Jesus and his disciples cross over to the Garden of Gethsemane (where Jesus will be taken prisoner), Jesus gives a lengthy and very significant talk to the apostles.
 - i. This talk is only recorded in John's gospel.
 - 1. According to early Christian historian Eusebius, John wrote his gospel after the other three gospels were in circulation (see Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, book 3, chapter 24). Therefore, John often is filling in details the other three gospels did not include.
 - ii. It extends from **John 13:31** through the end of **John 17** (over 4 chapters in length).
 - iii. Immediately after this address:
 - 1. In **John 18** He is captured and brought before Pilate; and
 - 2. in **John 19** He is crucified.
- c. This "Farewell Discourse" expresses Jesus final thoughts, concerns and warnings to the 11 faithful apostles immediately before his death. In it, He also provides critical direction for the church in the future. This body of teaching is extremely important and worthy of much serious reflection.
- d. Also note that Jesus touches on related issues multiple times within this discourse. He will address an issue, then come back to it again, weaving in teachings on the above topics throughout the four chapters. Therefore, in

order to develop each theme Jesus touches on, in our series of lessons will draw from related passages within these chapters as we work through the text.

- e. In this talk, Jesus touches on the following:
 - i. His imminent departure (and sorrow); but followed by His return (and joy).
 - ii. Importance of loving one another.
 - iii. The fact that Peter will deny Him three times.
 - iv. He is the only way to the Father.
 - v. His relationship with the Father (and His divinity).
 - vi. Loving Him means keeping His commandments.
 - vii. The coming and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and what the Spirit will do.
 - viii. The complete body of spiritual truth is to be entrusted to the apostles (which they will then hand down to others).
 - ix. About Satan.
 - x. Importance of abiding/remaining in Jesus: parable of the vine and branches.
 - xi. Persecution that will come upon His disciples.
 - xii. Jesus prays for his disciples to be protected from Satan.
 - xiii. Finally, Jesus prays for all who will believe through them, that we be perfected in love and unity.
- f. Again, this body of teaching is extremely important and worthy of our study and reflection!
- g. This section starts and ends with the importance of the disciples loving one another.

II. Jesus Announces His Departure

- a. Read **John 13:31-38**
- b. Summary of the story here.
 - i. Judas has just departed from the group.
 - ii. Jesus, speaking about Himself, says “Now the *Son of Man* is glorified”.

1. God will be glorified in Him (Jesus); and will glorify Him immediately.
- iii. Jesus refers to the apostles here as “little children”.
- iv. He explains that He is about to go somewhere that they cannot follow.
- v. He gives them a new command: to love one another as He has loved them.
- vi. Peter returns to Jesus’ comment that He is about to depart.
 1. Peter insists on knowing where Jesus is going; and wants to join Him wherever that is.
 2. Jesus says Peter cannot follow now; but *will later*.
 3. Peter says he is even willing to die for (or along with) Jesus.
 4. Jesus says that before the rooster crows (at daybreak the next morning), Peter will deny Jesus three times.
 - a. The accounts in **Matthew 26** and **Mark 14** indicate that while Peter specifically would deny Jesus, *all of the apostles would be made to stumble that night*. Jesus said this would fulfill the prophecy, “I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered” (**Zechariah 13:7**).
 - b. In the parallel account in Luke, Jesus tells Peter, “Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat”. (**Luke 22:31-32**).
 - c. Note that in **Mark 14:30** Jesus says before the rooster crows *twice*, Peter would deny Him three times.
- c. **Question:** What is the overall tenor of the discussion, and attitude of the disciples?
 - i. There is a sadness about what is about to happen.
 - ii. Jesus is like a parent addressing insecure children, telling them that He is about to leave them.
 1. What’s the typical reaction of children in this kind of situation? They wonder and ask: Where are you going? Why can’t I go with you?
 - iii. He refers to them here as “little children” (**John 13:33**).

1. Later He says, "I will not leave you as orphans" (**John 14:18**).
- iv. They are worried about him saying He is going to depart and leave them alone. Their attitude: Where are you going? Don't leave us! Why can't we go, too?

III. Now is the Son of Man Glorified

- a. **Question:** When Jesus says, "*Now is the Son of Man glorified*", is he referring to some long-awaited prophecy being fulfilled?
 - i. Are there any prophecies that speak about "the Son of Man" that might be in view here?
 1. Jesus applies the description "Son of Man" to Himself many places in the gospels.
 2. The term "Son of Man" appears several places in the Old Testament. We see it used many times in **Ezekiel** when the Lord is addressing that prophet, but also used in a few other places. Sometimes just refers to a human man (general), but other times the term refers to someone special who will come.
 - ii. Read **Daniel 7:9-14**
 1. This is a vision of Daniel where four terrifying beasts come out of the sea, after which one "like the Son of Man" approaches "the Ancient of Days" and is given everlasting authority and an eternal kingdom.
 2. Here, Daniel prophesies that the Son of Man will be glorified.
 - iii. Read **Psalms 8:4-6** (see **8:5-7** in the LXX)
 1. It speaks of the "Son of Man" who was made *lower than the angels* (meaning that He was *made human*).
 2. He was crowned with honor and glory; and set over all things.
 3. We know from the New Testament that this prophecy applied to Jesus (**Hebrews 2:5-9**).
- b. Jesus told the apostles that He would only be with them a little longer; they would seek Him, "but as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going you cannot come.'" **Question:** *Where and when* had Jesus told the Jews that?
 - i. **Answer:** Jesus had told the Jews who opposed Him, in the temple area, "... 'I am going away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin. Where I go you cannot come.' So, the Jews said, 'Will He kill

Himself, because He says, “Where I go you cannot come?”” (**John 8:21–22**, NKJV)

- ii. Jesus is telling his apostles that where He is going they can’t come with Him *now*; but they *will* come later.

IV. A New Command

- a. Jesus tells his disciples that He is giving them a new command. (**John 13:34**)
- b. **Question:** What is the “new command” that Jesus gives just before He is about to die and depart?
 - i. A command to “love one another” is not new.
 - 1. “You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.” (**Leviticus 19:18**, NKJV)
 - a. The second greatest commandment, to love your neighbor (**Matthew 22:39**), was in the Law of Moses.
 - b. Jesus had expanded on the meaning of “loving your *neighbor*” in the story of the Good Samaritan in **Luke 10**, showing that this includes those outside their immediate circle of their fellow-Jews.
 - 2. “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?” (**Matthew 5:43–46**, NKJV)
 - a. Jesus also had previously taught his followers *to love even their enemies*, and to do good to those who persecute them.
 - ii. Is this new teaching of Jesus in **John 13:34** referring to a new, special kind of love?
 - 1. The word that is translated “love” (four times) in **John 13:34–35** is the Greek word “agape”.
 - 2. The noun form “love” is ἀγάπη; and the verb form “to love” is ἀγαπάω.

3. This is one of the best-known Greek words in all of Scripture. If you have heard many sermons as a Christian, you probably have heard a few that mention “*agape-love*”.
4. Many times, I have heard preachers, priests and Bible teachers make the case that “*agape-love*” is a very special kind of love. The case generally is presented as follows:
 - a. We just have the *one word* “love” in English to express the positive sentiments we may have toward:
 - i. God,
 - ii. a spouse or child,
 - iii. a new potential girlfriend (as in “being in love”), or even...
 - iv. *chocolate ice cream*.
 - b. However, the argument continues, in Greek there are *several different words*, to more accurately differentiate *which type* of “love” we mean. Therefore (they claim) in the Greek, the New Testament writers are able to express the type of love intended, by the term selected.
 - c. There are several different words in ancient Greek (some say 3, others 4; and I have even read of some claiming *up to 7!*).
 - i. *Agape* – The claim is made that this word refers to the greatest, “highest” form of love; that this is a totally divine, sacrificial, unconditional, totally committed kind of love. It encompasses the love one would have for someone who was otherwise unlovable.
 - ii. *Phileo* – The claim is that this is term applies to a natural, human, friendly, brotherly type of love that one would feel naturally toward someone who treated you well.
 - iii. *Eros* – As you might assume, this word refers to erotic or romantic type of love that would draw two people together.
5. The case is generally made that Jesus’ new command is that we should love each other with this new, higher type of ‘agape-

love'. In other words, only by understanding the Greek here can we appreciate the significance of what He is saying.

- a. I have heard this so many times, in so many places over the years: at Roman Catholic funeral and sermons, in Bible classes, and in Protestant churches.
 - b. C.S. Lewis wrote about this in his popular book *The Four Loves* (c. 1960)
 - c. Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, a Roman Catholic teacher who was a writer and had a very widely seen TV show in the 1950's lectured and wrote about this.
 - d. Since so few know Greek (even among preachers) and this sounds good, hardly anyone challenges this or takes the time to explore whether this popular idea is true or not.
6. However, let's test this out and see if it holds water. We will use readily-accessible resources, so you can do it on your own and see for yourself if what I am claiming here is correct or not. Anyone can do this at home with access to an interlinear Greek-English New Testament (online or otherwise).
- a. The claim: "agape-love is a special, totally divine, sacrificial type of love".
 - b. Let's test the validity of this popular claim, by looking at other places in the New Testament where this word "agape" is used. (You can check this out on your own with an interlinear Greek-English New Testament, online or otherwise.)
 - i. "for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." (**John 12:43**, NKJV)
 - ii. "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (**1 John 2:15**, NKJV)
 - iii. "But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them." (**Luke 6:32**, NKJV)
1. Here *in all four cases* where we see the word "love", it is translating the Greek word "agape".

- iv. “Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.” (**Luke 11:43**, NKJV)
 - 1. The passage in **Luke 11** uses “agape”. However, the parallel passage in **Matthew 23:6** (“They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues”) uses “phileo”.
 - 2. This situation where we find Jesus using both words essentially interchangeably suggests that either the two Greek words have the same meaning, or at the very least they have significant overlap in meaning.
- v. Peter is blasting the wicked: “They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;” (**2 Peter 2:15**, NKJV)
- vi. In all of the above examples, the word “agape” certainly is *not* being used to describe a totally divine, unconditional, sacrificial type of love!
- c. Let’s also consider some examples of how the word “agape” is used in the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint. In noun or verb form, it appears over 300 times in the LXX. (You can explore Greek occurrences of NT words in the LXX with an Apostolic Polyglot Bible or similar resource)
 - i. In the story of Samson and Delilah in **Judges 16**:
 - 1. Samson is a strong, but very unspiritual man who has worldly attraction to the wrong kind of women!
 - 2. Samson “came to love a woman in Alshech whose name was” (**Judges 16:4**, LXX, OSB).
 - 3. After Delilah realizes Samson has lied to her the third time regarding the secret of his strength, she complains, “How can you say, ‘I love you’ when your heart is not with me? You have deceived me a third

time and have not told me where your great strength lies.” (**Judges 16:15**, LXX, OSB)

4. In both places noted, the word translated “love” is “*agape*”!
- ii. Read **2 Kingdoms 13:1-15** from the LXX (**2 Samuel 13** in other Bibles)
 1. It says of Amnon, who lusted after his half-sister Tamar and conspired to violate her, “Amnon the son of David loved her.” (**2 Kingdoms 13:1**, LXX, OSB)
 2. After violating his half-sister, it says Amnon then hated her “so much that the intense hatred he bore against her was greater than the love with which he first loved her”. (**2 Kingdoms 13:15**, LXX, OSB)
 - a. In all three cases where “love” is used in this story (in context, clearly referring to lust or perhaps an erotic type of love) *the word “agape” is used!*
 - d. It should be clear from the above examples, that the two terms (*agape* and *phileo*), rather than contrasting two different types of love, actually can refer to the same thing. Clearly, we can see that they have similar (the same or largely overlapping) meanings.
 - i. This means that the words “*agape*” and “*phileo*” are similar to our English word “*love*”, in that they also can have a wide range of meanings. We can only determine the meaning in a given passage *only by examining its context!*
 - ii. Therefore, in this particular instance, knowledge of Greek really does not give an advantage to the reader. It is much more important to be a skilled reader (in English) who can discern the intended meaning of the term *from its context*.
 - e. **Question:** How can all these *really smart people* be wrong? **Answer:** I don’t know; but this just goes to

show you that we can't just accept what other reputed experts say: even if they are highly intelligent, claim to know Greek, are reputed "Bible scholars", etc.

7. Also, when I checked back in the writings of early Christians (many of whom *spoke* Koine Greek), they did not seem to be making a particular distinction about agape versus phileo either (for the obvious reasons we have just discussed). That includes in **John 21:15-18**, where Jesus uses both terms when restoring Peter.
 8. Therefore, this idea of an "agape-vs.-phileo" sharp distinction appears to be somewhat of a modern theological fad, something that the early Christians did not recognize.
- c. A lesson for all serious Bible students here:
- i. If someone, even a world-famous author, preacher, study-Bible notes writer or commentator tells you "in the Greek it really means XYZ", or "based on the culture of that time, we should look at this like ABC", don't just believe it. Take time to check it out for yourself.
 - ii. Don't be lazy!
 1. Don't just trust secondary sources, including me. Check things out for yourself to see what is true.
 - iii. Although I have started studying Greek the past few years, I sorted this one out before I could read Greek.
 - iv. Actually, one of the main reasons I wanted to study Greek was for "spiritual self-defense". It seemed that almost half of the time when a preacher or teacher said, "in the Greek it really means...", after I checked it out for myself, I discovered that they were wrong!
- d. **Question:** So, what is "new" about this command to love one another?
- i. As we have seen, the "*newness*" of this new command has nothing to do with any special meaning attached to the Greek word, "*agape*".
 - ii. John Chrysostom (347-407 AD), bishop and preacher in Constantinople asked (and answered) essentially the same question in his *Homily 72 on the Gospel of John*. He wrote:
 1. "But how does He call that a new commandment which is contained also in the Old (covenant)? He made it new Himself by the manner; therefore, He added, 'As I have loved you.'"

- iii. Jesus had told the disciples, “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**, NKJV)
- iv. The new, higher call: to love one another as He loved them. In order to understand what this *new command* to love means, you do not need to be a great student of Greek! Instead, you need to be a great *student of Jesus' life*. How did Jesus demonstrate His love for others?
 - 1. Jesus *washed their feet*. (**John 13**)
 - 2. He was the Good Shepherd who would *lay down his life* for the sheep. (**John 10**)
 - 3. “Greater love has no one than this, than to *lay down one's life for his friends.*” (**John 15:13**, NKJV)
 - 4. Read **1 John 3:10-24**
 - a. If we are to be children of God, we must practice righteousness and love our brothers (**1 John 3:10**). *Both are essential.*
 - b. “He laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” (**1 John 3:16**)
 - c. We must not resent those who are more righteous than we are (as Cain resented his brother Abel, in **Genesis 4**).
 - d. We cannot shut up our hearts from our brothers. We are called to share our worldly goods with our brothers and sisters who are in need.
 - e. Love is not a matter of words, but actions and truth.
- e. Love for one another will be the sign to unbelievers that we are the disciples of Jesus. (**John 13:35**)
 - i. It is generally much easier to focus on the outward indications of God's favor (impressive architectural structures, historical lineage, correct theology on specific points, phylacteries, conservative clothing styles, head coverings, various rules), rather than the inward challenge to love others as Jesus did.
 - 1. Some of the outward things may be significant.
 - 2. However, love and unity were the signs Jesus said His followers were to have. (**John 13:35, John 17:20-21**)

- ii. Loving each other is much more challenging, in my opinion, than these other outward things; many of which also are important.
- iii. Love is not just a warm feeling. It involves action and truth.
- iv. It means resolving conflicts quickly. There is no room for gossip, slander, or bitterness.
- v. We can't just draw small, tight circle around our small church group. We are called to love and be unified with *all other sincere believers who are striving to follow Jesus*.
- vi. Here are some closing thoughts on the importance of loving one another as pertaining to evangelizing a lost world. John Chrysostom (from the same source as cited above) explains why loving others will have a much greater impact on reaching the lost than even miraculous signs:
 - 1. "...Omitting to speak of the miracles which they should do, He makes their characteristic, love. And why? Because it is this which chiefly shows men holy; it is the foundation of all virtue; by this mostly we are all even saved. For 'this,' He said, 'is to be a disciple; so shall all men praise you, when they see you imitating My love.
 - 2. "What then? Do not miracles much more show this? By no means. For, 'many will say, Lord, have we not in Your Name cast out demons?' (**Matthew 7:22**) And again, when they rejoice that the demons obey them, He said, 'Rejoice not that the demons obey you, but that your names are written in heaven.' (**Luke 10:20**) And this indeed brought over the world, because that was before it; had not that been, neither would this have endured. This then straightway made them perfect, the having all one heart and one soul.
 - 3. And miracles do not so much attract the heathen as the mode of life; and nothing so much causes a right life as love. For those who wrought miracles they often even called deceivers; but they could have no hold upon a pure life. While then the message of the Gospel was not yet spread abroad, miracles were with good reason marveled at, yet now men must get to be admired by their lives. For nothing so raises respect in the heathen as virtue, nothing so offends them as vice. And with good reason.
 - 4. "... (speaking of the heathen) Their own doctrines they have long condemned, and in like manner they admire ours, but *they are hindered by our mode of life*. To follow wisdom in talk is

easy, many among themselves have done this; but they require the proof by works.”

a. John Chrysostom is saying the following:

- i. The pagans *know* that their own philosophical beliefs are empty.
- ii. The *lives of the Christians he is preaching to* are an impediment to those who are lost, hampering them from coming into the kingdom.
- iii. A life of love is *more powerful even than miraculous signs*, in terms of persuading unbelievers.