

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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Program Number 1114
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World Headquarters: The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri

The Sermon: A NEW COMMANDMENT

Scripture: John 13:34,35; and John 15:12,13.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

This commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God, love his brother also.

How can a person know whether he is in love? An infallible test is this: "How much are you willing to do for the one you love? How much are you willing to suffer and to sacrifice for the welfare of the one you love? Would you die for him? Would you live a long life of rigorous deprivation and service to him? True love is a sacrificial giving of self for the blessing and benefit of the one loved. In the words of Bulwer Lytton:

"Love sacrifices all things
To bless the thing it loves."

God is love. The reverent, careful observer can discern countless ways in which God has sacrificially given himself for us. Paul says that "in him we live and move and have our being." The universe in which we live -- the earth on which we stand with all of its practical and beautiful provisions for sustaining our lives and for bringing us comfort and pleasure -- the laws by which all things are ordered and governed -- all these are manifestations of God and of his love. Our very life comes from him. We are a part of him. If God should cease to exist, we would cease to exist at the same instant. In a very real and practical sense, as well as in a sentimental sense, God is love. It is his sacrificial love which has created us and the universe in which we live, and which sustains us day by day.

Love is self-forgetful, self-sacrificial. Some great world religions, and even some religions that profess to be Christian, counsel complete retirement and seclusion from the world in order to guard one's self against temptation and

evil, pain and loss. That is not the way of love. God did not hold himself aloof from the world or from fallen man to guard himself against contamination. When man fell through sin, and became subject to death, God did not unconcernedly wash his hands of the whole business and say that since it was man's own fault he must take the consequences. He took command of the situation. He plunged into it with self-forgetfulness and sacrificial love. He gave his only begotten Son -- the most precious thing he had -- to redeem man.

True love does not retire from the scene when the going gets rough, or when the stakes in the game of life begin to get too high. True love does not retire into a cell and isolate itself from the realities of life in order to keep itself pure. True love plunges into the midst of trouble, giving itself in sacrificial, self-forgetful service, pouring out self unreservedly, unmindful of temptation and evil, of pain and suffering and loss. This is the kind of love exemplified by Jesus. With no thought of self, he joined with his Father in a cooperative and sacrificial venture of saving mankind from the result of their follies and sins and rebellion. Because God loved us, he gave his only Begotten Son. Because the Son loved us, he gave himself for us. Because they first loved us, and gave themselves for us, we return to them our love.

Love of our brethren is a natural consequence of our love of God, the Father of all. If we truly love him, we will love those whom he loves; and he loves all men as his created children. God is the source, the beginning, the cause, the in-

spiration for all human love. "Love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." "He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love."

In his parting discourse to his disciples, Jesus said: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." The Mosaic law of Leviticus 19:18 had commanded, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." But this Mosaic commandment was self-centered. One was to measure his love of neighbor by his love of himself. It was at least partly negative; love consisted largely in not hating or avenging one's self against his neighbor. It was restrictive. The commandment applied only to "the children of thy people," and did not require love for those outside the pale of Israel.

Jesus' commandment was new in that it went farther and was more inclusive. "As I have loved you...love one another." Jesus' love took no account of whether its recipient was of Israel or not. It took no account of race or sex or nationality or age. It took no account of self, because in Jesus' sacrifice self was crucified upon a cross of suffering, which by the blending of suffering and love became a cross of redemption. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Jesus laid down his life for his enemies, as well as for his friends. And his new commandment is, "As I have loved, so love ye."

Self-forgetful, self-sacrificial love is a sign of discipleship. Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." One cannot have this kind of love and be blind to the needs of the one he loves. This kind of love, by its very nature, must find expression in service. When the King invites the blessed to enter his kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world, those who are chosen will not be those who have spoken with the tongue of angels, or who have had the gift of prophecy, or who have had all knowledge or great faith, or even those who bestowed all their goods to feed the poor. Rather it will be those who had charity or love, and who out of that love fed the hungry, befriended the stranger, clothed the naked, visited the sick, and comforted the prisoner. Active, self-

forgetful, sacrificial love which finds its expression in service to others, is a sign of discipleship.

Self-forgetful, sacrificial love is also a sign of regeneration - a sign that the life of Christ dwells in us. "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we have loved the brethren." It is the nature of fallen, unredeemed man to live for self, to give no thought for the welfare of others. It is the nature of redeemed, regenerated man to live for others.

Love bears the infirmities of the weak. Love does not serve or please itself, but seeks the welfare of others. Love surrenders anything that might be a stumbling-block to a weaker brother. Love manifests itself in deed and in truth by keeping God's commandments, and by giving service to others. Love is never proud, or hasty, or impatient, or unkind. Love is quick to believe good and slow to believe evil about others. Love does not envy the success of others, or rejoice in their defeats.

Jesus used his parable of the vine and the branches as a prelude to his commandment that his disciples love one another. "I am the vine; ye are the branches." In a vine no part can serve itself at the expense of any other part, but each part gives of itself in service to every other part; and each part in turn receives of that which every other part has to give. The roots gather the nourishment from the soil and give it to the leaves; the leaves expose the sap to the sun and digest it, and return a reasonable portion to trunk and roots. The trunk and branches support the vine, and transport the sap throughout it, to nourish every part. If any part stopped the flow of sap in a selfish attempt to keep more for itself, the whole vine would die, and the selfish part would die with it. It is love that makes the vine live; it is love that makes all life on earth possible. As Disraeli once said, "We are all born for love .. It is the principle of existence, and its only real end."

Do you manifest this kind of love? Do I? We cannot be true disciples, or manifest God's life in us, unless we love one another as Christ loved us, and gave himself for us -- unless we love as Jesus loved, "Unto the end."

