

## The New Commandment Applications of The New Commandment

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Now we have been speaking about “The New Commandment” which is, “Love one another as I have loved you. (Inserted – actual verse-“**A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.**” – **John 13:34**) and we’ve laid out the foundation for the meaning of this new commandment. Now we are at the point of speaking about the applications of the new commandment. How do we lay hold of this, practically? Now here most people in their being Christians, walking in the things of the Lord, have been bombarded with the message: “Well you need to love. It’s about loving.”

That’s true but we turn from the Scriptures to popular psychology for our understanding of love. So we find ourselves describing love in terms of the two popular points of view on love today: one is “tough love”, the other is “tolerant love”. “Tough love” is variously described as consequential love—in other words, making people aware of the consequences of their actions. And “tolerant love” is meant to be: you’ve got to forgive and forget and not hold grudges otherwise it’s bad for you; it’s even bad for your health. Well as you can see, both of these points of view are seriously deficient and—as is so commonly the case—humans think that *their* paradigms, *their* alternatives, are the only ways of discussing these issues.

So at the outset I want to say that the understanding of love, Biblically, has nothing to do with either tough love *or* tolerant love. I’ll just take a few moments and show you why it doesn’t. Now that doesn’t mean it’s not tolerant at times and it doesn’t mean that it doesn’t hold you to certain norms at times. It doesn’t mean that. But it means that you cannot define the love of God in terms of these polar considerations. They are inadequate and irrelevant. Although very popular—ragingly popular in some cases among even Christian psychologists and Christian sociologists—but these are not standards that are appropriate for the understanding of the love of God.

For example take “tough love” for a moment. What is the true consequence of our sins... of all of our sins? If we hold that “tough love” is the appropriate way, which is: make them face up to the consequences of what they’ve done. Apply that to yourself; apply that to everyone and apply it uniformly. Where does that get us? It sends us all to Hell because the consequence of everybody’s sin is death. If God held us to the consequence of our sins then *none* would see God. I know immediately the point of view is: but this is requiring you to face up to the reality that sin has consequences. The answer is “no”; we *often* sin without even knowing that we have sinned and even more frequently we sin, we know we have sinned but we don’t want to deal with it.

Typically the notion of “tough love” finds its setting—especially when there are parents and other authority figures who are pretty fed up with the chronic nature of repeat activities without change—and the point of view is that as long as you keep *enabling* then they will think it’s okay. You know, most people who live in these dreadful things *know* it’s not okay and the solution is *not* to throw them out on the street *or* to keep them at home. The solution is: what is God telling you to do in *that* situation because that’s how He treats us. God will treat two people who commit the same sins totally differently. Does that mean He isn’t tough? Does that mean He isn’t tolerant? Does that mean He is inconsistent? No, it’s none of those things. These things are not relevant. These are not the relevant standards by which you decide how to love; it is understanding people and seeing people from the point of view of God. That’s what makes the difference.

Now let’s go to **I Corinthians**, the **13<sup>th</sup> chapter** and I’d like to begin to frame what “loving” means according to the Scriptures. In **I Corinthians 13:4**, this is the premiere passage in all the Scriptures on love. **“Love (Paul says) is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love (he says) does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. (Then he says) Love never fails.”** (Inserted – **I Corinthians 13:4-8a**) Now here is where we get in trouble. You will notice that when Paul is speaking he divides love into three basic categories: the first category might be called “love is”, the second category might be called “love is not” and the third category “love is always”.

You’ll notice this now—when he begins with what love is—he says, “Love is patient and love is kind.” Then he talks about what love is *not*: “Love does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud, it is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs, it does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.” And then when he talks about what “love is always” he says that love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres and never fails, which means it always keeps on. You will notice *this*

immediately: when he is speaking about what “love is” all he refers to in that category is what “love is”. When he is speaking about what “love is not” all he refers to in that category is what “love is not” and similarly when he speaks about what “love is always”, that’s what he’s talking about. He does not mix the categories. When he is talking about what “love is” he does not also talk about what “love is not”. When he is talking about what “love is not” he doesn’t talk about what “love is always”. When he is talking about what “love is always” he doesn’t also talk about what “love is not”.

We, however, mix the categories and we come up with “love is always patient, love is always kind”. Well he doesn’t say that. If he meant to say that he would have put it under the category of “always” or he would have said, “Love is always patient.” not simply that love is patient. When Jesus overturned the moneychanger’s tables, that was an overt lack of patience and it was also equally demonstrative of “rude” behavior—behavior that was abrupt and pugilistic. So He doesn’t mix the categories. Love is patient but love is not *always* patient, love is kind but it is not *always* kind. That’s my point, that’s what I wanted to show you. So today you hear people misquoting the Scriptures in support of popular psychological notions about what love is and these popular psychological notions about what love is absolutely dominate the discussion of what love is—whether we’re talking about wars, or we’re talking about social programs or bringing discipline or correction to church members or whatever. We see this very unfocused view of love, which is not Biblical; it’s entirely made up out of pop psychology and runs the patterns of whether somebody is irritated with another on the one hand or on the other hand simply does not want to confront the other.

Let’s now look at a story that will illustrate many of the qualities of love. The reason that these qualities of love are spoken to here in **I Corinthians**, and numerous other passages in the Scriptures, is not to create for you the “law” of love but it is to give you some sort of a template against which you might be able to measure how it is that you are following the Spirit of God moment by moment *and* that you can know that *this* is love. That’s what these lists exist for; not to become an exhaustive compiling of all of what love may be so that you walk down the list and you say, “Today I’ve been patient, today I’ve been kind, today I’ve done this and this.” It’s not that. It’s that as the Spirit of God moves you through the lives of others and directs your responses to others that you might be able to know that you are walking in love. That’s what these things are about.

So let’s look at a Biblical story that will illustrate a number of these qualities working together. Let’s take the story in the Scriptures that’s referred to as “The Story of the Prodigal Son”. (Inserted – **Luke 15:11-32**) Luke tells us that there was a certain man who had two sons. Now the man in the story is a father and, in that sense, is representative of God. This father had two sons; the younger of the two comes to his father and says to him,

“Father, give me that portion of the inheritance that will come to me when *you* die.”

Now he had no *right* to ask for this, so he was trafficking upon the benevolence of his father. Being the younger of the two sons, he did not receive the larger share. Now the father gave him that portion of the inheritance that would have come to him upon the death of his father and the Bible says that he took this and he went away and he wasted his substance in riotous living. Now when that is spoken in such proper terms it’s hard to fully appreciate what that means. In fact, to say one wasted one’s substance in riotous living puts such an academic face on it that it might seem like a plausible career path. But that’s not quite what he did. He went and he partied until the money was gone.

Now when you party like that, the normal habit is that you will come in at two or three o’clock in the morning—every morning—and then you sleep until one o’clock the next day. Then you get up in time to get ready for the next party. When you do that you typically are not on an exciting career path and when your money runs out the chances are you will not find that you are fully prepared for gainful employment and so you are limited in your employment opportunities. I was saying to a group of young people the other day that, as far as I know, you do not have to pass a drug test in order to be able to feed pigs. So he found the work that was available for someone of his level of skill and mental awareness and in that condition he comes to his senses and he makes up this story of what he wants to say to his father.

He decides first that he wants to go home and he decides that he would tell his father that he knew that he had behaved badly and that he was not worthy to be considered a son but sought only the place of an hireling. And then the father saw him coming a long way off. The father runs out and meets him and embraces him; [he] puts a robe on him, puts a ring on his finger, shoes for his feet. In fact [he] puts the best robe—it says, “Bring me the best robe.” Apparently the father was anticipating that the son would come back because he had fattened the calf in anticipation of his return. And so they killed the fatted calf and had a great fiesta. Now I don’t want to go into the story of how the older son responded because it’s not especially germane to the illustration to the use to which I intend to put this parable. And so there was a great rejoicing in the father’s house when the son who had gone away and wasted his father’s substance in riotous living in fact returned.

Now here are some interesting questions: did the father know what the son was going to do with the money that he gave him? Do you think that the father had any idea what the boy intended to do? Do you suppose that the boy intended—to bring it up to date and put it into a modern context—do you suppose that the boy came to his father and said, “Father, I am getting ready to go to study in a different university, in a foreign city and I would like for

you to give me this money so I can pay tuition and get all set up.” Do you think that the father had any idea what the son intended to do with the money? The fact that he was looking for him to come back clearly indicates that he knew *beforehand* what the boy intended to do with the money he was asking for. He knew that that boy was going to spend the money unwisely in all manner of riotous living—as his older brother would say, “wasted yo substance with harlots...” He would spend a lot of money on prostitutes and drugs, in modern parlance.

Now if the father knew what the son was going to do with the money why did he give him the money in the first place? “Tough love” would say, “No, you are enabling him.” Now when you consider that this father is a representation of God, and moreover, when you understand that God often—not once in a while, but God *often* will let us do the things that are in our hearts to do—then you will see that there is absolute relevance to this story and it makes the quantification of love—either as tough or tolerant—useless. Because here, if you employed “tough love” we wouldn’t have a story. If you employed “tolerant love” you would see the father saying to the son, “Aw, that was nothing and when you get ready to go again I’ll give you some more money.”

These are not what the story is about, but you have this dilemma that looks you right in the eye and strangely enough this is not a dilemma that’s unique to a story. Any number of you parents who are listening to this broadcast know exactly this dilemma. You know what they are going to do... what do you do? You know what is in their hearts... what are you going to do? As I said, if you follow the guidance of the popular Christian preachers, even today, there is only one answer: of course you don’t give them the money... you are crazy. Keep them at home. You know when a boy or girl comes to the place where they can ask for the money to go it’s just question of how they are going to fund what’s in their hearts. It’s not “if” they are going to do it, it’s a question of “how” they are going to do it.

Clearly the father knew what was in the heart of this boy but he also knew what the boy’s destiny was and knowing the boy’s destiny—knowing the character of the boy—he knew that that which stood between him and a useful life—pursuing his destiny—was this wild streak that was in him. Now if you understand that this story is comparable—has greater implications than is spoken here and involves the nations of mankind—the Gentiles and Jews—you’ll begin to see something of the scope of what is meant by this story. But for the purposes of “love” what are we to learn from this story?

Number one, we are to learn that every person has a destiny that God intends for them to fulfill. Your children have a destiny and it’s different from perhaps your idea of what that destiny should be but if you are alert to the Spirit of God you will see what stands between them and the fulfilling of this destiny. In the case of this boy,

whatever he was to be, he had this desire for “the party” in his soul and no matter what the father did, this desire for “the party” would have been dominant and would have found a way to express itself even if the boy had to leave home, go to work, and learn how to fund his partying and drug habits. The father, knowing that, gave him enough money to prevent him from developing the ability to both work *and* party. That way he could hit the wall sooner... *sooner* than later.

When he came to his senses he had not learned how to party and work as well. He became immediately destitute but now he could really *see* and he was confronted with the decisions of his life relative to his choices. When he came to that place he was in a state of repentance. When he repented and went home to his father, his father—knowing that he had set him up to come sooner to this conclusion rather than later—received him because immediately because the purpose for which he gave him the money had been accomplished. Sometimes we value the money more than we value the children and we teach them how to survive in a hard life because we’re told that “tough love” would never pay their way while they were coming to the place of hitting the wall. The father was not paying his way to have a party; the father knew what it would take for the boy to hit the wall and rather than allowing him to learn how to live *years* in that condition and come to his place only later, the father enabled him to come to that place sooner and it involved giving him the money to do it.

This is what we know about love then: love sees the “other” the way God sees them. You know what the destiny of that person is just as God knows what the destiny of that person is and you act—not out of preventing them or by manipulating them nor enabling them. You act based upon what the Spirit of God shows you to do because when the Spirit of God saw—and because the Spirit of God *knew* that the only way to turn that boy from his self-destructive ways was for him to arrive there sooner than later. And love will allow you to help them smack the wall sooner even if it costs you more. I want to continue this discussion on what love means. We’ve done enough for you to see that love is neither “tough” nor “tolerant”; these are irrelevant standards. There is a greater standard to love; it is doing what you see God doing because the Spirit will surely lead you. We’ll continue the discussion. I’m Sam Soleyn and I’ll see you next time.

### **Scripture References:**

John 13:34

I Corinthians 13:4-8a

Luke 15:11-32

