

A NEW AND FRESH COMMANDMENT

In his account of the Gospel, John records a most interesting statement made by our Savior. It was Jesus' last week on earth. He had gathered his closest disciples in an upper room in Jerusalem to observe the Passover meal. But He was also preparing them for His departure. In chapter 13 we read how Jesus washed the disciple's feet as an example in servitude (vs. 4-15).

John also revealed many of Jesus' final teachings before His crucifixion (chapters 14 - 17). In particular, the Son of man said, *"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."* (Jn. 13:34,35)

This is the only time it has been recorded that Jesus stated He was giving a new commandment to His disciples. But what did Jesus mean by "a new commandment"? Is it new in the sense that it had never been introduced before? No, because throughout time God has always expected his people to love one another and to love others as well.

Recall when Jesus was asked by the Pharisees about which was the great commandment in the law. He answered that they were to love God and to love their neighbor and *"on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets"* (Matt. 22:34-40) Evidently, loving one another was a commandment from way back!

The Greek word for "new" in this instance (Jn. 13:34), does not pertain to age but to freshness (Thayer). Jesus was giving His disciples a fresh (new) and invigorating commandment. It was time to remind His listeners of a principle that had either been forgotten or sorely neglected. Obviously, love among the disciples had been lacking and it was a trait that our Lord felt needed to be re-emphasized. So He announced a "fresh" directive to His followers. This is how the world would now recognize Christians, *"if ye have love one to another."*

John, the Beloved Disciple, repeats this commandment again years later in his writings. *"In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is the message that ye heard from the*

beginning, that we should love one another." (1 Jn. 3:10,11) As the apostle tells us, this commandment to love one another is not really new but was in effect from the very beginning of man's time.

Then in verse 12, John contrasts this idea to love one another with the case of Cain and Abel. This is perhaps the first story in the Bible that dealt with the subject of love (...or more correctly, what happens when you don't love!). Let us quickly notice a few points about this account.

1. It is a tale of two brothers (Gen. 4:1,2). Being earthly brothers would suggest a natural and close tie to each other. There should be a natural love between them.

2. They brought different offerings to God: Cain brought of the fruit of the ground and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock (Gen. 4:3,4). However, God had respect only toward Abel and his offering. According to Heb. 11:4, they were both informed by faith (i.e., by the word of God himself!) on what kind of offering to bring. We don't exactly know why Cain chose to bring something different, but he did nonetheless.

3. Cain got mad when his offering was refused (Gen. 4:5-7). Yet, he had been warned that if he followed God's instructions, then his sacrifice would be accepted. And if not, then sin would follow. How very true, as we are about to read!

4. Cain rose up and killed Abel (Gen. 4:8). Obviously Cain did not love his brother as he should have. Instead, he probably got jealous because his own offering was refused while Abel's offering was accepted. For a moment Cain got mad enough to hate, then to kill his own brother. This only illustrates another point that the apostle John wanted to make in his letter: *"Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him."* (1 Jn. 3:15)

Unfortunately there are still too many Cain-Abel instances in the world today. There are those who are supposed to love like "brothers" but hate like Cain: Jews vs. Arabs, whites vs. blacks, also co-workers, husbands and wives, etc. Even among members of the Lord's church there is not enough "love" or "charity" (1 Cor. 13) as ought to be. We spend too much time hating one another and getting mad or being jealous and not communicating with love.

Jesus gave His disciples a "new", fresh commandment: to love one another. What a novel idea in this time and age! We need to love God, love His Son, love our brethren ...love all for this is what distinguishes us as followers of Christ and God's children.

RAY McMANUS

A THOUGHT ABOUT THE PASSION MOVIE

I have yet to see the movie, "The Passion of Christ", but I've heard about it. A lot of people are talking about this recent production by Mel Gibson regarding the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ. The movie itself is controversial and very graphic in nature. In fact, it is filled with such graphic violence that it earned an R-rating.

From what I have gathered, though, watching the movie has created some intense and emotional reactions among many Christians and non-believers alike. It is quite moving and almost makes one feel that he is actually there, witnessing the punishment of Jesus. Some people have even gotten choked up trying to describe this movie. Why?

There is something about all this I don't understand. It seems as if Mel Gibson and Hollywood have found a way to reach people's heart with the Gospel story better than God could through His written Word. At least, judging from people's reaction it seems that way and it makes me wonder.

Wayne Jackson, editor of Christian Courier, has these similar comments: "I do believe, however, that something is awry when folks claim that they have never been so moved regarding the death of Jesus as by seeing this movie. Claudia Puig, a columnist for USA TODAY, wrote that, 'Watching the sadistic torture and crucifixion of Jesus...provides a more visceral experience than reading the New Testament ever could render' (2/24/04). Apparently, for such folks as these, Mel Gibson has been able to achieve, through his cinemagraphic skills, what the Holy Spirit was unable to accomplish through Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John."

Mr. Jackson continues: "Admittedly, the apostle John was the disciple who was the closest to the Savior. John especially is designated as 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' (Jn. 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20). One would expect therefore, that John, when

composing his account of the crucifixion, would have poured his soul into the record, describing with agonizing detail, the horrors of this bloody and dreadful scene of an inch-by-inch death. And yet that is far from the case.

The apostle, with amazing brevity, depicts the actual crucifixion in less than four dozen words in the Greek New Testament. *'Then therefore he delivered him unto them to be crucified. They took Jesus therefore: and he went out, bearing the cross for himself, unto the place called the place of a skull, which is called Golgotha in Hebrew: where they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus in the middle'* (19:16-18). Where is all the groaning, the Technicolor descriptions of gushing blood, the battered, swollen face, tormenting insects, gnawing dogs, etc.? Such descriptives are conspicuously absent!" (Please see www.christiancourier.com/penpoints_3/8/04 for the complete article written by Wayne Jackson.)

I do plan to soon see the movie myself. But I will remember it is only a movie and not a substitute for God's Word. As Mr. Jackson also points out in his article, the real emphasis of the crucifixion is not in how graphic we can visualize it, but the fact that Jesus died for my sins (Gal. 1:4)

RAY

GOSPEL MEETINGS

<u>DATES</u>	<u>PLACE & TIME</u>	<u>SPEAKER</u>
April 4 - 9	Noble Church LaFayette, GA	Harry Cobb (Wedowee, AL)
April 9 - 11	Antioch Church Monroe, TN	Gerald Carter (Eubank, KY)
April 16 - 18	Antioch Church Douglasville, GA	David & Danny Adams (Bloomington, IN)
April 18 - 23	West Broad Street Church Wedowee, AL	Jim Pritchard (Shawnee, OK)
April 19 - 25	South Shore Church near Ashland, KY	James McDonald (Woodbury, TN)

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. How did Aaron explain to Moses where the golden calf came from?
2. What time of day did several women go to the tomb of Jesus to put spices on it?
3. What kind of animal did Jesus call Herod?
4. What did the Psalmist ask God to create within him?
5. What news had Eli just received when he fell back and broke his neck?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .

and remember last month's questions?

1. In the days of Haggai, who stirred up the governor, the high priest, and all the people to rebuild the temple?
THE LORD (Hag. 1:14)
2. While Paul was in Ephesus he was going to Jerusalem and then he said he must also go see what city? ROME (Acts 19:21)
3. What are the elders to do when called for the sick? PRAY OVER THEM, ANOINTING THEM WITH OIL (Jas. 5:14)
4. For what type of heart did David pray for in Psalm 86?
UNITED (Psa. 86:11)
5. What two main articles were in the Holy Place of the tabernacle? A TABLE AND A CANDLESTICK (Exo. 26:35)