



**Sermon Study Guide**  
**The Beginning of the End: The Command of a Lifetime**  
**John 13:31-38**  
**\*\*Study Questions in Italics\*\***

**Introduction: The Importance of Christian Love Today**

- Years ago, as an unbeliever, I was amazed by my Christian friends. There was a depth and texture to their friendship that I'd never seen. I was first attracted to Christianity *not* because of the doctrine it taught but because of the lives it produced.
- A few years later I moved to Washington, DC and joined a local church there. The people in this church loved God's Word, and they loved each other. As my wife Deana and I talked and prayed about our future, we both agreed that we wanted to spend our lives building into this kind of church.
- *In what ways have you experienced the love of Christ through the love of Christians? How has it impacted your understanding of the gospel? Of the church?*
- John 13:31-38 is important to all of us. In fact, the verses we're about to study have never been more relevant. Here are two reasons why:
  - First, there is today a growing disillusionment with the church.
  - Second, we are witnessing a digital revolution that is corrupting our understanding of community.
- *What other reasons can you think of that make these verses important for all of us?*
- Carefully read John 13:31-38.

**First, the departure of Jesus. [JN 13:31-33]**

- Jesus and his disciples are seated, celebrating the Passover Meal. In just a few short hours, Jesus will be caught, beaten, and crucified.
- With the cross in mind, Jesus draws our attention to the fact that God is in sovereign control. Since Genesis 3:15, when God promised that Eve's descendant would crush Satan's head, God has been at work, in history, preparing his people for the day of the cross—when sin and Satan would be defeated.
- As Jesus sends Judas on his way, he knows the wrath of God the Father is about to be poured out on God the Son. Sins are about to be forgiven and sinners declared righteous. The Father and the Son are about to be glorified.
- *How does God's sovereignty over Christ's death comfort you? What implications does it have for the way we understand our salvation? Our circumstances?*

**Second, the demand of Jesus. [JN 13:34-35]**

These verses are the heart of our passage. So let's ask three, clarifying questions:

- One: what is the demand?

- Verse 34: *“that you love one another, just as I have loved you.”* Notice that Jesus is *not* speaking to the world in general but to his followers in particular (see I John 4:21 where John comments on Jesus demand). The demand is to the church—we are to love each other.
- But that’s not all. Notice the demand isn’t *merely* that we love each other, but that we love each other *as* Jesus did. Jesus is forever our model for love.
- We are to love each other as Christ loves us, and he died for us. This is a high standard. We need grace! We will fall short. But, the fact that we will fail to love one another perfectly should never keep us from loving one another passionately.
- Two: why is this demand so important?
  - The answer is in verse 35. The distinguishing mark of being a Christian is brotherly love. This does not minimize the importance of knowing sound doctrine, of being bold evangelists, of meditating on Scripture, of pursuing holiness. But Jesus does not single out any of these virtues as *the* distinguishing mark of a Christian. He singles out one virtue: brotherly love.
  - The gospel is commended to our unbelieving friends and family when they see the love we have for each other. Yes, we must speak the gospel. But remember, our love for each other is like a magnifying glass held over the gospel we speak.
  - *Are you regularly speaking the gospel to the lost? Does your love for other believers commend the gospel to those to whom you speak it?*
- Three: why is it called a ‘new commandment’?
  - What’s new here? The command to love is certainly *not* new! Read Leviticus 19:18. There, in the Old Testament, we find a command for Israel to have a special love for God’s people. So what is new about this commandment? When Jesus demands we love one another, he’s calling us to love those with whom we share only the gospel.
  - Before the cross, God’s people were primarily Jewish. Since the cross, God’s people have no primary ethnicity. The new commandment is new because the church is new—it is made up of people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.
  - In one sense the church is made up of all believers in all places throughout time. But, the demand Jesus makes in verse 34 makes the most sense in the context of a local church where you are formally committed to others.
  - *Are you regularly seeking out others in the church with whom you share only the gospel? Or do you tend to gravitate to those with whom you have the most in common?*

### **Third, the denial of Jesus. [JN 13:36]**

- It’s common to keep verses 35 and 36 separate, as if they really don’t go together. But that’s a mistake. They do go together. Look closely at verses 36 and 37. Didn’t Peter hear Jesus? Jesus just told Peter to love the disciples for the sake of the world. But Peter doesn’t care about the disciples and he doesn’t care about the world, he just wants to be near Jesus. It’s as if Peter is saying, “Look, Jesus, I don’t really care about these disciples, I just care about you. I just want to be with you. I just love you.”
- But is that really true? Does Peter *really* love Jesus? Look at verse 38. Jesus knew that Peter didn’t really love Jesus. John includes this exchange between Jesus and Peter

because he wants us to see that those who don't love their brothers don't really love God. Peter didn't truly love Jesus. If he really loved the Lord, Peter would have loved the Lord's people—the church.

- Peter wouldn't learn how to love until he stood on the other side of the cross. This is really important: you and I can't love each other until we stand under the cross. Without the gospel you simply see people as caves full of gold to be mined. You will simply use people for what you can get out of them. But the cross changes everything.
- We need to first confess that we are bad at loving, repent at our failure, and run to the cross of Christ where the Savior died for loveless sinners like us. Only then can we truly love each other.
- *What difference has the cross made in the way you love?*

#### **Four questions that clarify the “how” of Christ's command.**

- *First, do you encourage others with Scripture?*
  - Keep John 13:36-38 in mind and carefully read John 21:15-17. In this passage, Jesus asks Peter the same question three times. But Peter is a changed man, and so he says, “Yes, Lord, you know I love you.”
  - So what does Jesus tell Peter to do in response? “Feed my sheep.” To show Jesus that he really loves him, Peter is to pour himself into the lives of God's people.
  - One of the main ways we show our love for each other is by encouraging and challenging one another with the Word of God. Not all of us are called to be teachers—but we are all priests in the household of God, and we all have a responsibility to point each other to the Word of God.
  - *Have you ever had another Christian encourage you with Scripture? What did it look like? In what ways can you encourage a brother or sister in Christ with the word of God this week?*
- *Second, do you model holiness?*
  - Carefully read 2 John 5-6.
  - We love one another by modeling for each other what it looks like to obey Jesus, to live a holy life. One of the most practical ways you can love someone is by letting them see you fight the good fight of the faith. Let them look over your shoulder as you pursue holiness.
  - *Are you currently in a discipling relationship? In what ways would a relationship like this benefit you spiritually? How might it benefit the person you meet with?*
- *Third, do you look out for the interests of others?*
  - Carefully read Philippians 2:4.
  - If you are a Christian, then John 13:34 and Philippians 2:4 should change your whole mindset. You shouldn't come to church simply for what you can get from the family of God, but what you can give to the Lord's people. This should be the attitude of your heart, and it should change not only what you do, but how you do what you do.
  - One of the most loving things you can do is strategize this very week how you can put someone else's interests above your own. *How might you put another member of MVBC's interests above your own this week?*
- *Fourth, are you persevering with your brothers and sisters?*

- Think back to John 13:26 when Jesus hands Judas that savory morsel from the Last Supper. Jesus reaches out his hand and feeds his betrayer. This was a final act of compassion from Jesus to Judas.
- *If Jesus could show Judas such compassion, how much more should we persevere with true brothers and sisters who have let us down?*
- The longer we are together, the more likely we are to disappoint one another. There are no perfect Christians; there's no perfect church. But Jesus doesn't call us to love the perfect; he calls us to love one another. And that means persevering with each other. Your willingness to persevere, to stick it out, with sinners like us is evidence of the gospel at work in your life.

**Conclusion:**

- We live in a world that keeps its dirty laundry a secret. We hide behind upbeat Facebook posts and pictures of smiling children. But the world won't know that we are Christ's disciples by our smiles. The world will know that we are Christ's disciples not because we have it all together, but because we love like the only One who does. They'll see the love of Christ as we persevere with our brothers and sisters through the muck of life. This is the messy but beautiful part of being together in a local church.