

# Love: A New Command - Part 2

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## God's Gifts to Us: the Sabbath and Friendship

Jesus said in John 15:

As the **Father has loved** me, so have **I loved** you. Now **remain** in my love. If you **obey my commands**, you will **remain in my love**, just as **I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love**. I have told you this so that my **joy** may be in you and that **your joy may be complete**. My **command** is this: **Love each other as I have loved you**. **Greater love** has no one than this, that he **lay down his life for his friends**. You are my **friends** if you do what I **command**. **I no longer call you servants**, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, **I have called you friends**, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. **This is my command: Love each other** (vv. 9-17 NIV84, emphasis mine).

In part one of this two-part series, we explored how love originates in God and, as the sunlight shines

everywhere, it is always flowing to us. We also saw that we can choose to place ourselves in His love-light or hide ourselves from it.

When God's love is experienced and combined with the truth that Jesus revealed, we are simultaneously won to trust in God and convinced of the hopelessness of any existence outside of God's love. We remember how empty life was before we surrendered to Jesus, how sick of heart we were, how life was filled with fear, guilt, shame, and constant struggle, and how tiring it was to constantly have to fight to prove ourselves and get ahead. We rest certain and safe in how much we need and freely receive God's love.

Thus, by the truth and love of God, we are won back to trust so that we open our hearts to Him and are set right with God, and He pours His love into our hearts. Paul puts it this way:

Since we have been made **right with God by our faith**, we have peace with God. This happened through our Lord Jesus Christ, who through our faith has brought us into that blessing of God's grace that we now enjoy. And we are happy because of the hope we have of sharing God's glory. We also have joy with our troubles, because we know that these troubles produce patience. And patience produces character, and character produces hope. And this hope will never disappoint us, because **God has poured out his love to fill our hearts**. He gave us his love through the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to us (Romans 5:1-5 NCV, emphasis mine).

Love and truth originate in God, and it is this reality, the goodness of God, that wins us back to trust (Romans 2:4). When we trust God, we give God our consent, our permission, to work in us, and it is then that we are converted, reborn, renewed, transformed, and healed through the application of truth and love in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

We are then to "remain" in God's love. We don't earn God's love; we don't fight for it; we don't have to prove ourselves, to work for it, to compete for it, or in any other fashion struggle to receive God's love. God's love is not conditional! We are to abide in His love, to rest in His presence, love, goodness, and grace. We are to remain and live in God's love every single day, but we are to especially "rest" in His love on the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is a gift from God built into time for human beings; it was designed for us to *exercise* our rest—for us to *choose* to stop all our working—whether working for our own advancement here on Earth (business, school, etc.), working to earn love or prove ourselves to others (housework, yardwork, six-pack abs, etc.), or working to save ourselves through various religious rituals and law-keeping. The Sabbath is God's gift to us, made for humans (we were not made for the Sabbath), to give us the time to exercise our rest in Jesus, to rest in God's love, and be renewed, refreshed, and strengthened. But the Sabbath is only a blessing to us, only a place of rest, if it is a delight (Isaiah 58:13). If the Sabbath is a rule we must keep in fear of doing something wrong, then we are working on the Sabbath and are not resting in God's love.

But remaining in God's love means we are to obey His commands, but can love be commanded? Does commanding people to love you actually work? Can you get more love from your spouse or children by commanding love with authority and threats of punishment? No! Ordering others against their will only destroys love and incites rebellion—so what does it mean that Jesus commands us to love knowing that

love cannot be commanded?

## Imposed Love?

Our understanding and experience with God are determined by how we understand His character and law. If we believe Satan's lie that God's law functions like human law, imposed rules that require legal oversight and infliction of "just" punishments from the ruling authority, then we hear the words "command" or "commandment" as something legal—something imposed, a rule to be enforced. But to worship a dictator-like being is to worship a creature—for creatures, not the Creator, make up rules that require legal enforcement.

But when we return to worshipping the Creator, we understand that He built the cosmos and that His laws are design laws—the protocols reality exists and functions upon—like the laws of health, physics, *and* the moral laws. We realize that life and health are possible only when we are in harmony with God and His design protocols. Then we understand what Jesus is saying. He is saying that if you want to be healthy and thrive, then live in harmony with the laws of health. Likewise, if you want to remain in my love, then don't break the law of love. It is that simple!

Sin breaks God's design (law) for life. Sin is founded in lies and driven by fear, and fear turns the mind toward self so that the me-first survival drives dominate. But God's perfect love casts out all fear (1 John 4:18). When we experience and remain in God's love, His love frees us from being controlled by fear. And instead of seeking to protect self at the expense of others, we sacrifice ourselves to uplift and benefit others—just as Jesus has done for us!

This selfless love is not of this sinful world; it is not found in Satan or the kingdoms of this world. This eternal, healing, life-giving love comes only from God and flows to us through Jesus Christ via the work of His representative on Earth, the Holy Spirit. Whenever and wherever we see godly, selfless love, we are seeing the outworking of the Holy Spirit applying the victory of Jesus to individual lives, whether the people who love like this realize it or not, whether they acknowledge Jesus or not.

Understand this very clearly—no human since Adam's sin has possessed self-sacrificial love for others as a natural expression of their heart. Therefore, anytime we see selfless love in action, it is evidence of God's working in a human heart to win them, heal them, and save them from fear and selfishness.

Then Jesus does, from a worldly perspective, the most incredible, unbelievable, and truly preposterous thing—He refuses to accept us in the role of servants to Him, the King of kings and Lord of lords; instead, the Creator and Sustainer of all reality tells us His desire, intent, wish, and will for us—that we are to be His friends! This is astonishing—can you really imagine it? God, our Creator, our Savior, the infinite one Himself invites you and me to be His friends! Amazing grace, wonderful love! Oh to be a true friend of Jesus.

But what does it mean to be a friend of God? We must first and foremost be won back to love and trust. As long as fear and selfishness control us, as long as we love ourselves more than God, we will eventually betray God to protect ourselves. So in order to be a true friend of God, we must be won back to trust in Him—complete, abiding, and settled trust. This is the sealing, being so settled into the truth about God that we cannot be moved. We, like Job, might not understand what is happening, we might experience frustration, we might have many questions—but we continue to trust God so that our hearts

stay focused on seeking God, on talking with God, on searching out the answers from God—just like Job did. Despite all the world can throw at us, if we are God's friend, we will not doubt Him, we will never believe God is against us, that God is our enemy, that God is the source of pain, suffering, and death. We will be true friends of God, and like Job, we will say of God what is right!

But this requires that we not only love God but, as Jesus explicitly said, that we understand God's business! Servants don't understand the master or his business—they simply do what they are told. Servants are focused on the rules, the commands, the instructions, on not getting into trouble, on keeping themselves safe—if the master said it, they believe, and that is all there is to it. This is not love; this is fear and selfishness.

But friends go beyond rule-keeping, beyond simply doing what they are told—they enter into understanding relationship, empathy, love, and appreciation with and for the master. They share in His dreams, values, methods, and principles, and they align themselves with Him in heart. They are jealous for His reputation, His goals, His kingdom. They love what He loves and hate what He hates. And they care more about Him than they do about protecting themselves.

And then, as God's friend, who is won to love and trust, who understands His methods, principles, design law, His business of saving souls—we choose to work in God's field, His garden, seeking to tend to hurting souls to bring them back into friendship with God.

Anyone who is joined to Christ is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come. All this is done by God, who through Christ changed us from enemies into his friends and gave us the task of making others his friends also. Our message is that God was making the whole human race his friends through Christ. God did not keep an account of their sins, and he has given us the message which tells how he makes them his friends. Here we are, then, speaking for Christ, as though God himself were making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ's behalf: let God change you from enemies into his friends! (2 Corinthians 5:17-20 GNT).

What a joy, what a privilege, what incredible grace and love that we should be called friends of God!

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another (John 13:34, 35 NIV84).