

May 3, 2026

**First John**  
**II. Love One Another**  
**I John 2:7-11, John 13:34-35**

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Presbyterian pastor Winn Collier tells this wonderful story in his book, [Love Big, Be Well](#):

*A few months ago, Don Brady was our Sunday greeter, shaking hands as folks exited church. But Don takes joy in sending people out the door every week. As you know, he stands in the narthex, kissing the babies and the matronly women, sneaking candy to the kids, and dishing out hugs to anyone who will receive them. Is there a better sight than watching this big hunk of a man stooping down and enfolding another person in his massive arms? “Thanks for coming. You’re something special.” I swear I’ve heard those words a hundred times, but they still seem fresh to me.*

*On this particular Sunday, I had repeated Jesus’ words about the centrality of love and observed how sad it is whenever Christians turn out to be the meanest folks in town. A middle-aged man was visiting, and he grew visibly irritated. He shook his head and leafed aggressively through his Bible. Before the doxology’s final note settled, he hurried, head down, toward the parking lot. The flustered man moved so quickly that he missed Don at the back door; but Don would have none of that. He told me how he caught up to the fellow at his car and thanked him for joining us.*

*The man fiddled with his keys in the door of his Honda, offering a gruff “Thanks” in reply.*

*“We’d love to have you again sometime,” Don said, making a second pass.*

*“Not likely.” The man opened his door and tossed his jacket onto the passenger seat.*

*“Are you all right?” Don asked. He is nothing if not persistent.*

*The man was **not** all right. For the next ten minutes, this serious-minded fellow unleashed a theological discourse that had obviously been corked and building pressure for the last hour. He quoted Calvin and Augustine and Spurgeon. The man was frustrated with sappy churches and squeamish pastors who go lite on wrath.*

*Don was unfamiliar with most of these arguments. He simply listened, allowing the steam to dissipate. The exasperated man paused for breath, then concluded: “So, a lot of the Bible you’ve got to explain. Can you really say **love** holds everything else in place?”*

*Don considered this question, telling me later how he felt in over his head but also how he wanted to honor the fellow’s concerns. The parking lot was nearly empty, and quiet. Don answered carefully, “Yep, I think that’s the meat of it. Love’s the main deal.”*

*... I’ve preached a truckload of sermons on [this topic], and darn it if Don Brady, standing in an empty parking lot, didn’t nail it better than I ever have. It’s love. Love’s the main deal.<sup>1</sup>*

“*Love’s the main deal.*” And that is precisely what John wanted us to understand last Sunday when He told us that, “*God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*”<sup>2</sup> When it comes to understanding the meaning of the Incarnation, and the message of Gospel Jesus proclaimed and by which we are saved, “*Love’s the main deal*” says it quite well. And this morning, what we read in the second chapter of John’s letter is that when it comes to our walking in the light of God’s love for us, living by that light – there, too, love’s the main deal: “*Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling.*” As we live out our Christian discipleship in light of God’s love for us, one of the main ways we do so is by loving one another within the family of faith.

“*Beloved,*” writes John, “*I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning.*” Indeed, the command that we are to love one another is ancient. Way back when God was first forming Israel to be His covenant people, He gave them this commandment. That we are to love one another is present in the second tablet of the Ten Commandments – that we are not to kill one another, steal from one another, bear false witness against one another, and so on.<sup>3</sup> And it is explicitly stated in Leviticus 19:18: “*You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.*” So, indeed, the command that we are to love one another in the family of faith is as old as the existence of God’s family of faith.

But having said this is an old commandment, John then says, “*At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is shining.*” In other words, because of Jesus Christ and what He has done for us – the light of His love now driving out the darkness in this world and in our hearts – because of Jesus Christ this old commandment now has a new twist. What is it? John, in speaking of this as a new commandment, is pointing us back to something Jesus had said to His disciples during His last supper with them – something which John himself recorded for us in the thirteenth chapter of his Gospel. Jesus, on that night, had said to His disciples: “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another*” – that’s still the old commandment. The new part is in what comes next: “*Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.*” The new commandment is not just that we should love one another within the family of faith, but that we should love one another **as Jesus has first loved us!** That is the new commandment John is referring to, that we love each other as Jesus loves us.

So, how we do parse that out for our loving of one another – this instruction to love as Jesus has first loved us? Fortunately, that same chapter thirteen of John’s Gospel offers us two further guidelines. First, remember that just before Jesus spoke that new commandment to His disciples on that night, Jesus had first washed the disciples’ feet. And when He had finished doing so, He said to His disciples, “*For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.*”<sup>4</sup> And then He spoke to them of servanthood, of serving one another. So there is our first guide as to what it means that we should love one another in the family of faith as Jesus has first loved us: that we should serve each other, help each other, take care of each other.

A Presbyterian church in Ohio once sent out a survey asking its members to recount an episode in which they had experienced the love and care of their church family. The response was overwhelming. Here are just a few:

*As a single mother with no family here, a very kind, thoughtful single mom asked us to join her extended family for a Mother’s Day lunch. I would have been alone again on a holiday. How much I appreciated the gesture.*

*When our son was born, church members provided more food than we could have ever eaten . . . What a way to go out of their way to be sure we were all made to feel so special.*

*I thank God for someone who cut our grass all summer after my husband’s heart attack . . . who decorated the outside of our house one Christmas when he was sick . . . who sent cards on “unofficial” occasions.*

*During a time when I was feeling very low and lost and alone, a member stood by my side – brought dinner, sent notes, and set up a time to walk and talk with me – her encouragement through friendship, prayer, and listening showed me how generous God’s love is.*

*On Christmas Eve afternoon a special person who attends [our church] surprised me with a phone call asking me to please join her and her extended family for the entire day of Christmas – breakfast through dinner. Thanks to that wonderful, special heart of that woman, I did not take my life. God shouted that he needed me.*<sup>5</sup>

And that’s just one small sampling of one single church. If we were to do such a survey here, the stories would be just as telling, and perhaps even more overwhelming and wonderful – because I have seen it here in this family of faith again and again and again, brothers and sisters in Christ caring for one another, taking care of one another, reaching out and supporting one another in Christian love. We love one another as Christ has first loved us – the new commandment by

which we show that we are walking in the light and no longer in the darkness – we love one another by serving one another, helping one another, looking out for one another.

And, within the larger chapter thirteen context of that new commandment Jesus gives, there is a second guideline given for how we love one another in the family of faith as Christ has first loved us. Just after pronouncing that new commandment, Jesus then tells Peter of how Peter is going to deny Him three times that evening, the night of Jesus' arrest.<sup>6</sup> And yet, as we saw at the end of John's Gospel, Jesus doesn't therefore throw Peter away, doesn't cast Peter out of the family of faith. Jesus holds on to Peter, reconciles Peter to Himself. He doesn't allow Peter's human frailty and failings to cost him his place in the family of faith.<sup>7</sup>

So for us to love one another as Jesus has first loved us means that we practice that same holding on to one another in the face of our own human frailty and failings. That we do not break fellowship with one another when we find ourselves at odds with one another. We hold on to one another, we stay in relationship with one another, even when it is hard to do so. We don't run away from church. We don't discard our fellowship with one another. We hang in there with one another, and work to make it better with one another.

For, in the family of faith, from time to time, we will most certainly disagree with one another, find ourselves disappointed with one another, angry with one another – there will even be times when we hurt one another. We are, after all, only human – justified to be sure, but still a long way from being fully sanctified in Jesus. So to love one another in the family of faith as Jesus Christ has first loved us – the way Jesus, for example, loved Peter – means that we hold on to one another even in those difficult times. Hold on to one another, bear with one another, keep the conversation going, working to be reconciled to one another. We never turn our backs on one another. We never walk away from one another. And so the love Jesus has for us – the love with which He has first loved us – enables us to find a way through it together, will even make our bond with one another stronger because of it. I've seen it happen – often. Churches made stronger through the struggle. Relationships within the family of faith made deeper and even more meaningful through the loving-one-another work of reconciliation.

A preacher tells of touring a church cemetery in the South Carolina low country, when he came across a single grave marker set crosswise to all the others. Rows and rows of orderly concrete slabs, like soldiers on parade. And then this one concrete slab market set crosswise – the preacher calls it “cattywampus” – to all the rest. The preacher sees someone else in the cemetery, and calls out:

*“Are you from around here?”*

*“Yeah,” he said. “You’re looking at that grave, aren’t you?”*

*“Yes.”*

*“I knew that fellow.” The grave marker recorded that the man had died in 1994 in his seventies. “We were in the same church. I knew him well. Knew him all my life.*

*I said, “Why this burial at an angle?”*

*“Well, the family wanted that, and the church agreed.”*

*“But why?” I asked.*

*“Because that’s the kind of guy he was.”*

*I said, “What do you mean, ‘That’s the kind of guy he was’?”*

*“He was crossways with everybody and everything. We never knew him to be pleased about anything at home or at church. ‘Well, why’s she doing that?’ he’d say, or ‘Why’d they ask him to do that?’ or ‘Well, he’s the wrong one to be doing this,’ or ‘Well, I wonder who decided to do that?’ He said that kind of stuff all the time, all the time, and the family decided they wouldn’t try to change him just because he was dead. So they buried him crosswise.”*

*“That was an awful thing to do, “ I said.*

*“They wanted it to be a witness. The family said if God wants to straighten him out then God can straighten him out. But he left here just like he lived.”<sup>8</sup>*

They wanted it to be a witness to how he lived his life crosswise to the good people in his family of faith. But I think it bears witness to something better: how that family of faith held on to him, put up with him, even loved him, kept fellowship with him even when he didn’t make it easy for them. How that family of faith learned how to love him as Christ has first loved us. In the family of faith we don’t just bear one another’s burdens<sup>9</sup>, we bear with one another.

Which leads to one last thought regarding this new commandment Jesus gives us and which John exhorts us to keep. Back in John 13, Jesus finishes His instruction that we are to love one another within the family of faith as He has first loved us with these words – with this promise: *“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”* The world will see the love we have for one another in the church, and will be drawn in by that love in order to find that love of Christ for themselves.

When I preached on this new commandment in John 13 several months ago, I ended that sermon with words from Francis Schaeffer’s little book, The Mark of a Christian. I’d like to end this sermon with those same words. Schaeffer writes:

*Through the centuries men have displayed many different symbols to show that they are Christians. They have worn marks in the lapels of their coats, hung chains about their necks, even had special haircuts.*

*Of course, there is nothing wrong with any of this, if one feels it is his calling. But there is a much better sign – a mark that has not been thought up just as a matter of expediency for use on some special occasion or in some specific era. It is a universal mark that is to last through all the ages of the church till Jesus comes back.*

*What is this mark?*

. . . 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.<sup>10</sup>

In other words, love really is the main deal.

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<sup>1</sup> Winn Collier, Love Big, Be Well (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), pp. 55-57.

<sup>2</sup> I John 1:5.

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 20:12-17.

<sup>4</sup> John 13:15.

<sup>5</sup> Tod E. Bolsinger, It Takes A Church To Raise A Christian (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), pp. 172-173.

<sup>6</sup> John 13:36-38.

<sup>7</sup> John 21:15-19.

<sup>8</sup> Fred B. Craddock, "Who Am I to Judge Another?" in The Cherry Log Sermons (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p. 72.

<sup>9</sup> Galatians 6:2.

<sup>10</sup> Francis Schaeffer, The Mark of a Christian, accessed on-line in July, 2025 at [www.ccel.us/schaeffer.html](http://www.ccel.us/schaeffer.html).