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Earl P. Merz

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ir_merze@csl.edu

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THE NEW COMMANDMENT

JOHN 13:34

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of New Testament
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by

Karl P. Merz

June 1955

Approved by:

Victor Barthig
Advisor

Fredrich W. Danker
Reader

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The story is told of a visit that Bishop Doane made to a certain scholar's home. During the course of the evening and the subject of religion was thoroughly discussed. One of the questions that he had put to the Bishop was this: "What are the signs of the times?"

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I.	INTRODUCTION	1
II.	JOHN'S USE OF <i>ἐντολή</i>	3
III.	<i>καλός</i> AS USED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT	8
IV.	THE "HEMNESS" OF <i>ἀγάπη</i>	14
V.	COMMENTATORS ON JOHN 13:34	22
VI.	PARALLEL PASSAGES	27
VII.	CONCLUSIONS	32
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	34

Is Jesus perhaps here giving a summary of the commandment? If so, why does he call it love? Is it now in the sense that it is an old commandment with a new emphasis? Is it now because Jesus was giving a new defining sense, a new matter for challenge? Is it now in the sense that there is now supplied a new object that is to be loved, or a new subject who is to do this loving, who has never loved before? These and many other questions can be raised about this passage in an attempt to determine why Jesus called this commandment "love."

Obviously there are too divergent as we proceed for the solution to this problem. There might be those who contend that since Jesus has now

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The story is told of a visit that Bishop Ussher made to a certain nobleman's home. During the course of the evening meal the subject of religion was thoroughly discussed. One of the questions that his host put to the Bishop was this: "How many commandments are there?" Without hesitation the bishop replied, "Eleven," and quoted, as an addition to the Decalogue, the passage in St. John's Gospel that is to serve as the basis for this thesis: "A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you, that ye also love one another."

Both before and after Bishop Ussher's time, the phrase: "The new commandment" has troubled many commentators. Briefly stated, the problem is this: Why did Jesus call this a "new" commandment? Was the Decalogue inadequate and incomplete, that Jesus had to complete it by adding another commandment? Is it correct to say that there are now eleven commandments? Is Jesus perhaps here giving a summary of the commandments? If so, why does He call it "new?" Is it new in the sense that it is an old commandment with a new emphasis? Is it new because Jesus now provides a new driving force, a new motive for obedience? Is it new in the sense that there is now supplied a new object that is to be loved, or a new subject who is to do this loving, who has never loved before? These and many other questions can be raised about this passage in an attempt to determine why Jesus called this commandment "new."

Basically there are two dangers as one presses for the solution to this problem. There might be those who contend that since Jesus has now

given a "new" commandment, all commandments that have gone before are no longer necessary. Hence that which stands written in the Old Testament is of little value to the Christian today, other than supplying him with a fairly accurate, though incomplete, history of the Jewish nation. Such a position ignores clear passages in Scripture which speak reverently of the Old Testament, e. g., II Tim. 3:15 ff., and Jesus' careful reference to Moses and the prophets.

On the other hand, there might be those who contend that this is no "new" commandment at all, but merely a summary of old commandments made by a man who was a great thinker, and who by his perfect life set an example for all to follow, so that if men lived and loved as he had done, the world would be a much better place in which to live.

We shall take a position somewhere between these two dangerous camps as we endeavor to define concretely the essence of "newness" contained in this passage.

CHAPTER II

JOHN'S USE OF *ἐντολή*

Proposition: John uses *ἐντολή* to express the will of God as revealed in the person and work of Christ.

Many New Testament writers use the Greek word *ἐντολή* in a manner that is unknown to St. John. St. Matthew, for instance, writing in his Gospel about the details of Jesus' life, reports that Jesus often referred to Old Testament laws and precepts, and many times called them *ἐντολαί* (15:3; 22:36 ff.). St. Mark, too, tells how Jesus made mention of the law of divorce given by Moses, calling this law an *ἐντολή* (10:5). St. Luke, apprising Theophilus of some of the details of Elisabeth's and Zachariah's life, writes that this devout couple kept all the Old Testament *ἐντολαί* and ordinances of the Lord blameless (1:6). The Apostle Paul follows the general usage of this word. He makes many references either to parts, or to all, of the Old Testament Law, and these he, too, calls *ἐντολαί* (Rom. 7:6 ff.; Eph. 2:15). In general, then, the word is most commonly used by New Testament writers to point back to the ordinances and precepts of Old Testament Law.¹

The Apostle John, however, never uses *ἐντολή* in the above-mentioned manner. The Beloved Disciple had been very close to his Master during His years of public ministry. It was John who with Peter and James

¹Outside of John, *ἐντολή* is used about thirty times in this manner. And it is only used about eleven times to indicate something other than Old Testament Law, e. g., orders given by men.

belonged to the intimate inner circle of Jesus' disciples. John along with these other two disciples had seen Jesus transfigured on the Holy Mount. And it was Peter, James, and John that Jesus took with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane as He went to pray that first Maundy Thursday evening. John, of all the disciples, stood at the foot of the cross while his Master suffered in agony even unto death. Surely it can be said of him that he was the disciple closest to Jesus.²

John had been very close to his Lord, and as he writes, by divine guidance and inspiration, his Gospel and Epistles which deal with his relationship to his Master, it would be unnatural for him to refer to God, and the lessons of faith and life which pertain to God, without recalling and involving Him from whom he had learned so much. Hence John's references to God the Father must of necessity always include a witness to God the Son, either expressed or implied, for John now knew no God other than had been revealed to him in the person of Christ. Indeed, for John, Christ is God as He faces men (John 1:1 ff.).

Also in John's use of the word *ἐν κοίῃ* this factor of inseparability between the Father and the Son comes to the fore, because John, unlike the other New Testament writers,³ does not use this word to point back to Old Testament laws, wherein God revealed His holy will before the birth of Jesus, but rather employs the word only to express the will

²Henry H. Halley, Pocket Bible Handbook (Chicago: Henry H. Halley, c.1944), p. 471.

³St. Peter is the only other exception. He, too, like John, uses *ἐν κοίῃ* only to refer to the commandments which have been revealed through Jesus.

of God as revealed in the person and work of Christ.⁴

To cite some of the passages where John uses the word is to illustrate how Jesus is always vitally involved in revealing the will of God to men. First of all, there are those passages where John speaks of *ἐντολή* which Jesus has received from His Father.⁵ Through John Jesus tells the world that He is the Good Shepherd. A good shepherd is ready to lay down his life for his sheep. Jesus, too, is ready to surrender His life, for He has received an *ἐντολή* from His Father to do so (John 10:18). John remembers that when Jesus taught them, He continually told them that He was instructing them as His Father had given Him *ἐντολή* (John 12:50). Indeed, everything Jesus does reveals the will of God to men, for all His actions are in harmony with the will of God, in that He has kept His Father's *ἐντολή* (John 14:31; 15:10). Hence *ἐντολή* here indicates the charge, covering the total mission of the Son, which is not coercion, nor an imperial command, but an appointment and commission flowing from Fatherly love, taken up voluntarily by the Son.⁶ It was the will of God that Jesus should live, suffer, and die, and Jesus very carefully obeys, and reveals, that will.

⁴John does use the word *ἐντολή* in one other sense, and that is in reference to commandments of men (John 11:57). This does not negate our proposition, however, because there John is speaking of orders which men gave, and this has nothing to do with revealing the will of God. (Other places where *ἐντολή* is used in the same manner: Luke 15:29; Acts 17:15; Gal. 4:10; Titus 1:11.)

⁵No other New Testament writer uses *ἐντολή* in this manner.

⁶Cf. Gottlob Schrenk, "*ἐντολή*" Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, II, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1935), p. 550.

In the second place, ἐντολή in John's writings becomes an identification mark of the Christian. Jesus, in keeping His Father's commandments, not only does His Father's will, but also thereby reveals what God's will is with respect to men, namely, that men keep Jesus' ἐντολαί (John 15:10). For by this men cannot only determine for themselves that they are doing the will of God (John 14:21; I John 2:3 f.; 5:2 f.), but also can declare to the world that they are, in truth, Christians (John 13:35). That is the mark of a true follower of Jesus, to keep His commandments. To keep Jesus' commandments is to be in harmony with His will, and therefore in harmony with the will of His Father. Indeed, those who claimed they knew God and were in harmony with His will, but did not accept Jesus, and refused to keep the commandments that He had given, were liars, and the truth was not in them (I John 2:7 f.). Hence, for John there was no way which men could take to know the will of God, other than through Jesus. Even when John spoke of ἐντολαί as coming directly from the Father (I John 4:21; 5:2 f.; II John 4 ff.), these ἐντολαί involved the Son directly, for by definition the ἐντολαί which came from the Father were these: Believe on the Son, and love one another (I John 3:22 f.). Also in his Revelation John speaks of the ἐντολαί of God and the faith and testimony of Jesus in the same breath (12:17; 14:12). In John it is simply impossible to divorce Jesus from any ἐντολή of God.

A study of the word ἐντολή and the way John uses it, reveals that any reference to a commandment from God always involves the person of Jesus Christ. Christ is God facing man, and for John it was always through Christ that these commandments were fully revealed. As we are confronted, therefore, with this use of ἐντολή in the passage

which is under discussion in this paper, we arrive at this conclusion: We cannot begin to understand what makes this ἐντολή⁷ which Jesus gave His disciples "new," unless and until we include in our reckoning the life, the words, and the works of Jesus. Without such consideration we would not only fail to grasp the full meaning of this passage, but we would also fail to keep any of these ἐντολαί. Christ is not only the source, but also the motive power, the impetus which enables us to keep His ἐντολαί.⁷

⁷Ibid.

CHAPTER III

ΚΑΛΥΪΣ AS USED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Proposition: ΚΑΛΥΪΣ is always used in the New Testament to denote something novel. It is used especially to denote the New Era involved in the coming of Christ.

The Greek word ΚΑΛΥΪΣ is of central importance in this paper. Had Jesus only said to His disciples, "I give you a commandment, that as I have loved you, even so you should love one another," this passage would present little difficulty. But Jesus called this a ΚΑΛΥΪΝ ΕΝΤΟΛΗΪΝ, a new commandment. It is important in the present study, therefore, to examine the word ΚΑΛΥΪΣ carefully, to see how it is used in the New Testament, in order to understand fully the import and significance of the word as it is employed in the passage under discussion.

By definition, ΚΑΛΥΪΣ denotes something novel:

ΚΑΛΥΪΣ . . . the new, as set over against that which has seen service, the outworn, the effete or marred through age
ΚΑΛΥΪΣ will . . . imply praise, for the new is commonly better than the old (It) may express only the novel or strange, . . . not only new, but sufficiently diverse from what has gone before to stimulate . . . curiosity.¹

ΚΑΛΥΪΣ means: "Recently made, unused, unworn; . . . novel, uncommon, unheard of."² ΚΑΛΥΪΣ comprehends some complete otherness, which only now is coming into use.³

¹R. C. Trench, Synonyms of the New Testament (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., Ltd., 1915), pp. 206-8 passim.

²J. H. Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (New York: American Book Co., c.1889), p. 317.

³Cf. Johannes Behm, "ΚΑΛΥΪΣ," Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament, III, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1935), p. 451.

By usage, *καλῶς* always denotes something novel. For instance, *καλῶς* is used in the New Testament to indicate something new, in the sense that it has not been used before. Jesus, in one of His parables, speaks of putting new (*νέον*) wine into *καλῶς* wine-skins, that is, skins that had not been used before (Matt. 9:17). In another place, Jesus tells His disciples that a good tailor would not patch an old garment with a *καλῶν* piece of cloth, because the new piece would shrink and tear a bigger hole in the garment (Mark 2:21). When Joseph of Arimathaea took Jesus' body from the cross, he placed it in his own *καλῶν* tomb, wherein no body had ever been laid (Matt. 27:60). In all three of these cases where the word *καλῶς* is used, the articles called "new" were not necessarily new in time,⁴ but "new" in quality (*καλῶς ad rem*).⁵

In a second instance, the New Testament writers use the word to indicate something new, in the sense that it was unheard of before. As Jesus instructed the people, He taught with authority, and not as the Scribes and Pharisees. He taught in a manner which was unheard of to Jewish ears, and hence, as the people heard Him speak, they remarked, "What is this *καλῶν* teaching?" (Mark 1:27). At Pentecost the disciples received a special measure of the gift of the Holy Spirit, so that they were able to speak in tongues that must have sounded quite strange to those Galileean fishermen. Jesus had prophesied about this incident, when, shortly before He ascended into heaven, He told His disciples that

⁴When the New Testament writers wished to denote something that was new in time, they quite consistently used the word *νέος*, e. g., Matt. 9:17.

⁵Cf. Trench, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

they would speak in "new" tongues (Mark 16:17). The Athenians were confronted with the doctrine of the resurrection from the dead, which was quite new, that is, novel or strange to them. For as the Athenians took Paul to the Areopagus, they expressed their wonderment at what he was saying, and raised the question, "Are we able to understand this *καλυή* doctrine?" (Acts 17:19). In this same connection, Luke reports that the Athenians busied themselves in trying to outdo one another by speaking or hearing something "more new" (*καλυότερον*) than before (Acts 17:21).

In both of the above-mentioned instances, *καλυός* denotes something novel. In a third instance, and now this word plunges deeply into New Testament revelation, *καλυός* is used in connection with the New Era ushered in through Christ, and involved completely in Him. *καλυός* comprehends the miraculousness of what this new age of salvation brings.⁶ The New Testament speaks of the many different manifestations of this New Era: the New Covenant, the New Man, the New Creation, New Heavens and a New Earth, which are all revealed through Christ. Jesus speaks, and a part of the New Era is revealed. He says, "Take drink, this is my blood of the New Covenant" (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20).⁷ Paul faithfully repeats these words of Jesus (I Cor. 11:25). Paul frequently uses *καλυός* when referring to the New Era that has dawned in Christ, speaking of pastors who are "fit ministers of the New Covenant" (II Cor. 3:6), teaching about the New Creation of God and the New Man who is to dwell in the New Creation (II Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15).

⁶Cf. Behm, *op. cit.*, p. 451.

⁷The word *καλυός* appears in the manuscripts K, C, D, and others, and is quite generally accepted now as being textually correct.

Eph. 2:15; 4:24). The writer to the Hebrews makes much of Christ's New Covenant surpassing and replacing the Old (8:8; 9:15).

God has indeed "introduced a new order into the world, which entirely surpasses the old, doing away with its scales of values, and creating new tasks and possibilities."⁸ Jesus, by His birth, life, teaching and death, creates a new people of God. The aim of this loving action on the part of God is the New Man. Thus the relationship of the New Covenant, the New Creation, and the New Man is clearly seen. God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, replacing the Old Covenant with a new one. In this redeeming action God has made His New Creation, and the men that live therein are also new—no longer Jew and Greek, no longer bond and free, but all are one in Christ (Eph. 2:15). The New Creation is essentially different from the Old, in that it follows not the letter, but the spirit (II Cor. 3:6); it is better than the former (Heb. 7:22); founded on better promises (Heb. 8:6); without any blemishes (Heb. 8:7); eternally valid (Heb. 13:20); the complete antithesis of its obsolete predecessor (Heb. 8:13).⁹

Christ is the beginning, the middle, the all of this New Era. Before He came upon this earth, men were pointed forward to His coming. In the fullness of time He was born of a woman and placed under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law. In Him was the power to save, and through Him men were changed and were given the liberty to

⁸Gottfried Quell, "Love," Bible Key Words, translated and edited by J. R. Coates (New York: Harper and Brothers, c.1951), p. 50.

⁹Cf. Behm, op. cit., p. 452.

serve. True believers in Christ, now living in this New Eon, derive their faith, life, and hope from its Founder, and it is in Him that they await the New Heavens and the New Earth, according to His promise (II Pet. 3:13). And it is through Him that John can speak in his Book of Revelation of a "new name, a new Jerusalem, a new song, a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 2:17; 3:12; 5:9; 21:1 ff.). It is true that these last things, too, were spoken of and promised already in the Old Testament (Is. 42:10; 62:2; 65:15 ff.), but in Christ these future things become present, that which has been promised is now being fulfilled.

καὶνός is not used in the New Testament without referring to something new, not necessarily new in respect to time, but new with regard to degree of difference. Above all, *καὶνός* becomes the goal-directing key word of apocalyptic promise,¹⁰ fulfilled by Christ through His incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. And since all this is "new," it replaces that which has become old. This is not to say, however, that the old is annihilated, that all which stands in the Old Testament must now be discarded as a book of outworn Jewish doctrine, for these things, too, were written for our learning. Indeed, Jesus Himself says, "Every scribe instructed in the Kingdom of Heaven is like a houseowner who brings out of his storehouse new things and old" (Matt. 13:52). What Jesus is saying there is essentially this: "Next to these new things which you have learned from Me stand old things, which you learned from Moses and the prophets. Both must be utilized." The Old Testament points to and promises that which Christ reveals. And

¹⁰Ibid., p. 451.

in the agreement of the old and the new there was a harmony that the disciples could not, and should not, disrupt.¹¹ The disciples were to use the old things as vehicles for the new.¹²

A study of this word reveals that whenever it is used in the New Testament, some novelty is indicated; also in the phrase *καινήν ἐντολήν* there must be something of "newness." Like *ἐντολή*, *καινός* points us directly to the person and work of Christ, and it is to Him we must turn in order to comprehend fully wherein this element of "newness" lies. For it is through Christ that God has spoken to men, "Behold, I make all things *καινὰ*" (Rev. 21:5).

¹¹Cf. A. Schlatter, Der Evangelist Matthaeus (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1948), p. 451.

¹²Cf. A. Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew (London: Elliot Stock, 1909), p. 198.

CHAPTER IV

THE "NEWNESS" OF ἀγάπη

Proposition: The Christian concept of ἀγάπη is not fully understood in the Old Testament commandment of love itself, but is revealed and explained in the person and work of Christ.

Another key word in the passage under discussion in this paper is ἀγάπη. It has long been recognized that the concept of ἀγάπη represents a distinctive and original feature of Christianity. To examine this word is perhaps to draw nearer to the solution to our problem, for if the question can be answered: "In precisely what does the originality and distinctiveness of ἀγάπη consist?" we may be able to understand better the "newness" of the commandment which Jesus gave His disciples.

Many different theories have been advanced, suggesting why Christian ἀγάπη is distinct from any other concept of love that has gone before. Some might regard the combination of the two Old Testament commandments of love as the specific achievement of Christianity. Others might contend that the Old Testament relationship between God and man was cold and loveless. But it can be stated at the outset that the Old Testament never failed to make love central in this God-man relationship. It was the duty of every Jewish father to teach his son to love the Lord with all his heart, and his neighbor as himself (Deut. 6:4 ff.). God desired love from His people, and not sacrifice (Hos. 6:6). The commandment of love was indeed very prominent in the Old Testament.

And yet, it seems that the Commandment of Love can be called specifically Christian. The reason for this should not be sought in the commandment as such, because the commandment itself did not change. But

the reason must be found in the quite new meaning that Christianity has given the commandment. To look for an understanding of the idea of Christian ἀγάπη in the Old Testament commandment of love would be to go in a circle. The commandment does not explain the idea of ἀγάπη, but insight into the Christian concept of ἀγάπη enables us to grasp what this commandment means to a Christian. We must therefore seek a different basis on which to discover the Christian concept of ἀγάπη.

A. ANDRES NYGREN AND ἀγάπη

Andres Nygren, in his celebrated dissertation on Agape and Eros, discusses some suggested solutions as to what makes Christian ἀγάπη unique from anything that has gone before. We will list some of those suggestions here, along with Nygren's opinion of them, to see if any one of them can be accurately applied to the problem before us.

First of all, the distinction is made between the Old and the New Testament in this, that in Judaism love was exclusive and particularistic, while Christian love was universal in scope. The Jew loved his fellow man as one of God's chosen people; Christianity, however, surmounted such bounds, for in Christianity there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free (Gal. 3:28). But Nygren charges, and rightly so, that this factor cannot shed any light on the essential concept of Christian love, because universalism is not Christianity's most distinctive feature.¹

Secondly, some regard Christian love as arising essentially out of social considerations. This is not true, Nygren contends, and quotes

¹ Andres Nygren, Agape and Eros, translated by Philip S. Watson (London: SPCK, 1953), pp. 63-4, passim.

Troeltsch in support:

Christianity was not the product of a class struggle of any kind; it was not shaped, when it did arise, in order to fit into any such situation; indeed, at no point was it directly concerned with the social upheavals of the ancient world.²

Thirdly, some regard Christian love as purely and simply a negation of the Jewish doctrine of retribution. There are some points which might favor such an interpretation. For instance, Christian love involves a transvaluation of all previously accepted ideas, Nygren contends. In relation to these Jewish values, therefore, ἀγάπη has a negative, critical significance, as can be seen in the Sermon on the Mount. But to take such a position would mean that Christian love was determined ultimately by the outlook of its opponents, that is, that Christianity was only a response to negative criteria set up by other religions, specifically Judaism.³

The fault of the interpretations discussed above, Nygren argues, is that they all fail to recognize the fact that Christian love rests on a basis all its own. What, then, is that basis?

What Jesus seeks to bring is not a new conception of God, or new ideas about God, but a new fellowship with God; that is to say, the new element is connected with the very heart of the religious life, for it concerns the very nature of fellowship with God itself. Here we have the new wine . . . which in due time was to burst the old wine-skins and let Christianity emerge from Judaism as a completely new religion. Christian fellowship with God is different in kind from that of Judaism; and therefore Christianity, in spite of its historical connection with Judaism, and in spite of other bonds and affinities between them, is a fundamentally different thing from Judaism.⁴

This fellowship with God is new, because it is not governed by law, as

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 65.

⁴Ibid., p. 68.

it was in the Old Testament, but by love. And yet Nygren is quick to point out that this does not mean that Jewish law had no room for divine love. God was a God of love there, too, but only because of His Covenant, Nygren contends. According to this, then, God's love was bound by the limits of the Law and the Covenant.⁵ And to equate Old Testament divine love to Christian ἀγάπη appears to Nygren to be a dangerous proposition:

There is scarcely a more insidious way of emptying the Christian idea of love and Christian fellowship with God of their vital content than to treat God's love for sinners—that clearest of all expressions of the new way of fellowship with God—as merely a special case of the old legalistic religious relationship. Christian fellowship with God is distinguished from all other kinds by the fact that it depends exclusively on God's agape. We have therefore no longer any reason to ask about either the better or worse qualities of those who are the objects of Divine love. To the question, Why does God love? there is only one right answer: Because it is His nature to love.⁶

So far in his discussion of ἀγάπη, Nygren has dealt only with the relationship of God to man. Now the question arises, "How does ἀγάπη work in the hearts of men, to direct them in a new relationship toward their neighbor?" For the answer to this question Nygren turns to Christ, and points out that Jesus, in His discussions with His disciples, showed what ἀγάπη really meant, by taking the old commandment of love, and filling it with new content, namely, the new fellowship with God that He Himself had brought:

Neighborly love loses its specifically Christian character if it is taken out of context of fellowship with God Nothing could be more disastrous for the Christian idea of love than that it should be identified with modern ideas of altruism, fellow-feeling, and

⁵Ibid., p. 71. To prove his point, Nygren quotes Ps. 103:17 f., and Deut. 7:6 ff.

⁶Ibid., p. 75.

so forth Christian love really has nothing at all to do with such modern ideas.⁷

We have presented as objectively as possible Nygren's views on ἀγάπη, especially with regard to its relation to the Old Testament. While we readily grant that the full scope of ἀγάπη does not appear as clearly there as in the age of fulfillment, all the elements of the New Testament concept are foreshadowed, not only in God's spoken and written Word, but also, and primarily so, in God's activity as there recorded. With Nygren we discard the suggestions that he himself rejects; but we cannot go along completely with him when he offers his own solution to this problem, namely, that the distinctiveness of ἀγάπη lies in the fact that God's love in the Old Testament was limited by His Covenant, while in the New Testament He loves because it is His nature to love. Such a conclusion would necessitate a changing God, and God changes not.⁸

B. PAUL'S CONCEPT OF ἀγάπη

While Nygren does not himself give us an unexceptionable answer to the problem of this chapter, he does point us to two men who throw light on the subject under discussion. If we were to ask Paul what ἀγάπη is, he would point us to the cross. Nowhere else is there to be found a revelation

⁷Ibid., p. 95.

⁸To demonstrate this point further lies beyond the purpose of this paper. The reader, however, is referred to the article written by Dr. Walter R. Roehrs: "The Grace of God in the Old Testament," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXIII, 895-910; XXIV, 41-52; and the literature referred to in the notes appended to this article. A more adequate treatment of ἀγάπη in the Old Testament than Nygren's is that of Viktor Warnach, Agape (Duesseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1951), pp. 54-88.

of what ἀγάπη is that can be compared to Jesus' suffering and dying on the cross:

What Paul says here is exactly the same as we find in other words in the First Epistle of St. John: "Hereby we know love, because He laid down His life for us" (3:16). If we had not seen the love that is revealed on the Cross of Christ, we should not have known what love, in the Christian sense of the word is It testifies that it is a love that gives itself away, that sacrifices itself, even to the uttermost.

Paul points out further that the ἀγάπη revealed on the cross in the death of Christ is in no way independent of God. Indeed, God Himself is the subject of this ἀγάπη . It is God who proves His love for us. ἀγάπη is the love revealed in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:39; II Cor. 5:19).

God's love in Christ Jesus is of the highest kind, because it is entirely spontaneous and unmotivated. Paul points out, "Why, scarcely for a righteous man will anyone die, though perhaps for one who has been good to him some one might even have the courage to die. But God showed us His love, in that while we were yet His enemies, He died for us" (Rom. 5:7 f.). When Paul, therefore, speaks of ἀγάπη, he is not giving us a concept freely created by his own spirit to set forth, but he uses the word as a representation of something that has actually taken place. God has given us a demonstration of His ἀγάπη by giving us His Son. The connection Paul sees between the cross of Christ and Christian ἀγάπη gives sacrifice a whole new meaning, which enables it to be included in the new Christian order of fellowship with God (Eph. 5:2).

As Nygren puts it:

Here God's love meets us, not merely as an idea of love, but as the mightiest of realities, as self-sacrificing love, the love that

⁹Ibid., p. 118.

pours itself out even for the most deeply fallen and lost.¹⁰

C. JOHN'S CONCEPT OF ἀγάπη¹¹

Like Paul, John points out that the starting point for Christian ἀγάπη is God: "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He first loved us" (I John 4:10). But John immediately comes with our responsibility over against this love, when he mentions ever and again that we, too, must love God, because God loves us. ἀγάπη as shown by Jesus is the pattern for His disciples to follow in loving one another, and this mutual love is the token that they are His disciples. Love for God and love for the brethren belong so closely together that the one can be inferred from the other (I John 4:20 f.). The commandment of love therefore occupies a central place in John.

There is a wide range of agreement between John's concept of love and Paul's. As was mentioned before, it is the cross that reveals the deepest mysteries of divine love (I John 3:16). In John, especially, love means the self-communication of God to the Son, and it furnishes the starting point for a series of self-communications, from God to Christ, from Christ to the disciple, from the disciple to the brethren. This is the unbroken chain of Christian ἀγάπη.

Since the Old Testament commandment of love in itself did not change, it cannot, of itself, explain what ἀγάπη means to the New Testament

¹⁰Ibid., p. 120.

¹¹Nygren contends that John's concept of ἀγάπη does not go as deeply as Paul's. He charges that John is much narrower in scope, and that he mixes motivated and unmotivated love together. We are not inclined to agree, but the reader is referred to pp. 151-9 of the work previously cited.

Christian. But this does not mean that we should be ready to discard most of the Old Testament, as Nygren seems prone to do, because the Old Testament foreshadows and promises all of the elements of ἀγάπη that are clearly revealed in the person of Christ. Rather as we turn to Christ, and see in Him the living example of divine ἀγάπη, we should acknowledge all the ground work that has gone before, and which has served to prepare us for the divine ἀγάπη revealed in the person and work of Christ.

Like ἐνδοχή and καλός, then, ἀγάπη points us to Christ as we seek to find the novelty of the commandment which Jesus gave His disciples.

CHAPTER V

COMMENTATORS ON JOHN 13:34

Proposition: Most commentators look to Christ, in one manner or another, for the answer as to what makes this a "new" commandment.

The word studies which we have made so far have all pointed us to Jesus Christ as the answer to our question, "What makes this a new commandment?" From what we have learned, we might be able to draw some conclusions. But before doing so it will be wise to consult commentators on this subject, to see what their opinions are. A glance at several of the more prominent commentaries will show that although there seems to be some disagreement with regard to the precise connotation of the word *καίρος*, nevertheless most commentators look to Christ as the key to this "new" commandment.

First of all, there are those commentators who contend with Knapp that Jesus taught both by example and precept that man should love his neighbor more than himself.¹ E. C. Hoskyns belongs to this group, for he writes:

This commandment is indeed old, but it is also new, for whereas the Old Testament demanded that men should love their neighbors as themselves, the New Law is that they should love the brethren better than themselves, and die for their friends.²

Hoskyns quotes several passages from Scripture to support his view. It is his contention that as Jesus taught His disciples to love their enemies,

¹F. Godet, Commentary on the Gospel of John, III, translated by S. Taylor and M. D. Cusin (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1900), p. 126.

²E. C. Hoskyns, The Fourth Gospel, edited by F. N. Davey (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1950), p. 151

to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give water to the thirsty, and to love one another, he was giving them the wherewithal to love others more than themselves.³

Most other commentators, however, seem to disagree with Hoskyn's position. Lee,⁴ quoting Schrenk, says, "'Newness' consists not in the commandment of love in general, and not in a new degree of loving." Westcott⁵ also takes issue with such a position, for he claims that nothing in the context suggests that the intensity of the commandment of love is increased, so that men were now to love their neighbors more than themselves. Meyer is equally vocal in disagreement:

The novelty lies not in the commandment of love itself, nor yet in the higher degree of love to be found in "As I have loved you," so that the requirement would be, that one should not merely love his neighbor as himself, but ὑπὲρ ἑαυτοῦ, since καθὼς does not indicate the degree or the type, and since, moreover the Old Testament "As Thyself" does not exclude, but includes the self-sacrifice of love.⁶

In the second place, there are those that would like to get around the whole problem by doing violence to the word καθὼς, giving it in this context a special meaning not found elsewhere in the New Testament. Wolf, for instance, would make the word mean "illustrious." Olshausen thought the word should mean "always new." Calvin would make the passage read this way: "Behold, I renew the commandment with you." St. Augustine

³Hoskyns quotes these passages: Matt. 5:43-8; 22:39 f.; 25:31-46; John 15:13; Rom. 12:9 f.; 13:8 ff.

⁴E. K. Lee, The Religious Thought of John (London: SPCK, 1950), p. 247.

⁵B. F. Westcott, The Gospel according to St. John (London: John Murray, 1903), p. 198.

⁶H. A. W. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook of the Gospel of John, translated by William Urwick (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1884), p. 399.

thought this commandment which Jesus gave His disciples was one to "renew man." And Seuler thought that *καρπός* in this passage carried the force of "unexpected."⁷ Godet, although he lists these suggestions, does not think this is the solution to the problem, and other commentators do not even mention this as a possibility.

Thirdly, there are those who offer as a suggestion one of the solutions mentioned, and rejected, by Nygren.⁸ Godet offers this as a partial explanation to the problem. He says, "The entirely new character of Christian love is brought out first by the words: 'One another.' . . . This is an entirely new circle."⁹ In other words, the commandment is new, because it is universal in scope. Supposedly, the Jewish law of love applied only to members of that race, or foreigners who had embraced the Jewish religion. But this new commandment applies to all believers, according to Godet, and that is what, in the first place, makes it "new."

Godet, however, has a further solution to the problem:

But on what does its existence depend? Upon the appearance of an entirely new center of life and affection upon earth. The love of a Jew for his neighbor arose from his seeing in him a worshipper of Jehovah, a being beloved by Him; thus every Israelite was to him a second self. So, too, it was from the love of Jesus for the disciples that this love for each other resulted. From this new hearth there issued forth the flame of an affection very different from any which the world had hitherto known: in Christ is the true explanation of this word "new."¹⁰

⁷Cf. Godet, op. cit., p. 126.

⁸Cf. chapter four, above, where Nygren points out that universalism is not Christianity's most distinctive feature.

⁹Godet, op. cit., p. 126-7.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 127.

According to Godet, then, the "newness" of the commandment consists, first of all, in the universalistic scope which it embraces, and secondly, in Christ as the center, and the motive power, from which this love proceeds. It is the second part of Godet's solution with which most commentators seem to agree. Westcott says:

In this case, the "newness" of the commandment . . . must be sought in the newness of the motive and of the scope, inasmuch as the example of the self-sacrifice of Christ, begun in the Incarnation and consummated at His death, revealed to men new obligations and new powers.¹¹

Meyer uses these words:

The novelty lies rather in the motive power of the love, which must be the love of Christ . . . This distinction rests simply upon the fact that Christian brotherly love must be mutually determined and sustained by the personal experience of the love of Christ; . . . hence it is always this point alone which forms the substantial contents and the distinguishing feature of the new commandment as such.¹²

Schrenk, according to Lee, is inclined to agree:

"Newness" consists not in the commandment of love in general, not in a new degree of loving, but rather in the novel Christological reference: they are to love one another as they are loved by Jesus. They are to realize the love of which Jesus lays the foundation.¹³

Most commentators follow this same general line of thinking. Hendriksen, one of the most recent commentators on the Gospel of John, shows that the thinking has changed very little since Meyer's day:

The newness of the precept here promulgated is evident from the fact that Jesus requires that his disciples shall love one another as he loved them! His example of constant self-sacrificing love (think of his incarnation, earthly ministry, death on the cross) must be the pattern for their attitude and relation toward one another.¹⁴

¹¹Westcott, op. cit., p. 197.

¹²Meyer, op. cit., p. 400 passim.

¹³Lee, op. cit., p. 247.

¹⁴W. H. Hendriksen, Exposition of the Gospel according to St. John, II (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954), p. 253.

In short, then, most commentators look for the newness of the commandment, its power, its source, and its scope in the person and work of Christ. Nor have they taken this conclusion out of the thin air. They base their argumentation on the clause found in this passage: "As I have loved you." In other words, it is Jesus Himself who lays claim to this commandment as His very own, and it is this defining clause, more than anything else, that points the commandment to Jesus:

Jesus again gives this command with fresh emphasis, this time adding to it the characteristic definition: "As I have loved you." . . . *καὶ ὡς*, as, means more than a simple comparison: it indicates a conformity, and characterizes the mutual love of believers as of the same nature as that which unites Jesus to the believer, each returning to his brother the love with which Jesus loves him.¹⁵

Meyer had made the statement already previous to Godet, that *καὶ ὡς* does not express degree, but corresponding relation, as appears from the following subordinate clause denoting purpose.¹⁶ Thus grammar supports the contention of these men, that the "newness" consists in Christ as the center and focal point of this new commandment.

And so we arrive at the understanding that Christ holds the answer to the problem of the "new Commandment." Even Hoskyns, who does not agree entirely with most of these men, says that it is from the example and teaching of Jesus that this new commandment came. To cite more commentators of this passage would only belabor the point already made, for all commentaries consulted seemed to agree in this much: Christ holds the answer to the new command.

¹⁵ Godet, op. cit., p. 127.

¹⁶ Meyer, op. cit., p. 401.

CHAPTER VI

PARALLEL PASSAGES

Proposition: Parallel passages reveal that Christian love, as it is involved in the New Commandment, is founded in Christ, and is true in Him.

Our paper would be incomplete without reference to at least two parallel passages found in the Epistles of John which have a direct bearing on the problem before us. More passages could be mentioned and discussed, especially several from the Epistles of Paul, but these two should suffice to show that also in other places, outside of John 13:34, Christ is named as the Source and Founder of true Christian love.

A. I JOHN 2:8

First of all, we cannot overlook John's reference to the "new commandment" in his First Epistle. There, in the second chapter, John speaks of an "old" and a "new" commandment. And in speaking of this new commandment, John is no doubt referring directly to the passage under discussion in this paper. We note that John calls the commandment "true in Him." As Jesus laid claim to this commandment, and called it His very own by telling His disciples to love one another "as I have loved you," so John, too, is indicating that this new commandment comes from Jesus, because it is "true in Him."

And as we consider what certain prominent writers have to say about this passage, we notice that they all lay the commandment at Jesus' feet, and indicate that it is surely through Him that this commandment is "new." C. H. Dodd, for instance, has this to say about this passage:

This well-known precept of Christ is not, he says, a new command, in the sense that it is something added to the original Gospel In what sense then is it called . . . a new command? In the sense in which "all things are made new" in Christianity. For to be a Christian is to be living in a new creation, as Paul said, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature."¹

What Dodd is saying is essentially this: The coming of Christ was God's means by which He made all things new. With Jesus there came a new creation, a new man, new heavens and a new earth. As all these things are new, so also is this commandment "new" which Jesus gave to His disciples.

Brooke, too, looks to Christ and His teachings to understand this new commandment:

The expression *καὶ ἡν ἐποίησεν* recalls so vividly the language of the Gospel . . . that we are almost compelled to interpret the passage in accordance with John 13:34 . . . where the "newness" is to be found in the new standard required, . . . rather than in the duty of mutual love, which was recognized in Jewish law The old commandment . . . received a new meaning and application in the light of Christ's teaching and example, and in the lives of His followers.²

Westcott's understanding is very similar:

The commandment of love was new to the disciples who had followed Christ when He gave it them on the eve of the Passion in a new form and with a new sanction. It was new also to the believers whom St. John addressed in proportion as they were now enabled to apprehend with fresh power the Person and Life of Christ That which gave novelty to the commandment was found in the larger and deeper views of Christ's Person and of the work of the Church which had been unfolded since "the beginning." Old words . . . had become new.³

¹C. H. Dodd, The Johannine Epistles (New York: Harper and Brothers, c.1946), p. 34.

²A. E. Brooke, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Johannine Epistles (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), p. 34 passim.

³B. F. Westcott, The Epistles of John (Cambridge: Macmillan Co., 1886), p. 53 passim.

G. G. Findlay devotes a whole chapter to a thorough discussion of this problem. A very able writer, he strikes at the heart of the matter, and in rather poetic language clearly and concisely outlines and defines the New Commandment. Because he so capably deals with the very problem before us, we would like to quote him at considerable length:

"The commandment" here intended can be none other than Christ's law of love for His disciples—that which our Lord singled out amongst the divine precepts to stamp it for His own, saying, "This is my commandment." (John 15:12); this ordinance is the touchstone of all the rest. It is the commandment of our Epistle, and recurs six times in its five chapters The commandment he means is a well-known rule, the ever-sounding order of the day for those to whom he writes; it is a precept which will occur of itself to the readers, needing no definition or preamble. There was but one law of the Christian life . . . not the general obligation to copy the pattern of Jesus, but the express direction coming from His lips, that those who believe in Him should love one another A new heaven and a new earth were in the making for mankind; and the law that governed this creation, though old in its origin as the being of God, was new in its operation as the character of Jesus Christ—old as the thought of the Eternal, new as the cross of Jesus, or as the latest sacrifice of a life laid down for His love's sake "Herein is love" . . . as though no one had ever known or heard of love before!—so completely did this demonstration surpass antecedent notions on the subject and antiquate earlier examples. The commandment was put upon another footing, and was clothed with a fresh and irresistible power But the death of the cross accomplished more than this; it gave the law of love, an authority new in its kind, a vicarious and redeeming efficacy.⁴

That is the substance of Findlay's exposition, in his own words. His statements are quite easy to understand, and any attempt on our part to add to his explanation would serve rather to detract from it. Suffice it to say, that of all the commentaries read and/or discussed in this paper, we are probably more in agreement with Findlay, than with any other.

⁴G. G. Findlay, Fellowship in the Life Eternal (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), pp. 155-68 passim. The reader is strongly urged to examine the whole chapter on the "old" and the "new" commandment as found in this work.

B. I JOHN 3:16

Closely related to the previous passage, is the one listed here, where John writes, "In this we know love, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Here John defines "love" for his readers. Men do not have to guess what the love of God means. They need only look at Christ, and they see a living and perfect example of this love. And from Him they are to learn a lesson that all are to follow. As He loved, so are they to love, even if this means great sacrifice on the part of the Christian, yes, even if this means death.

Most of the commentators on this passage refer the reader to their comments on the verses we have discussed previously. Dodd, however, makes a quite extensive, and appropriate, comment:

Thus, in explaining what sort of action is intended by the commandment, "Love one another," the Christian teacher has neither to fall back upon some speculative, a priori, conception of the love of God, nor to become involved in the discrimination of various kinds of "love" among the chaotic manifestations of human affections and impulses. It is strictly true, in the history of thought and language, that we know what ἀγάπη means from the fact that Christ laid down His life for us. The practice of love, or charity, therefore, can be broadly described in terms of the imitation of Christ. It is clear that from the outset the "law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2), by which Christians are bound to direct their conduct, was defined in the Church's teaching, not only by the traditional precepts of Jesus, but also by His example. The appeal to His example is explicit in: I Cor. 11:1; I Thess. 1:6; II Cor. 8:9; 10:1; Rom. 15:2 f.; Phil. 2:2-8; I Tim. 6:13; I Pet. 2:21; Heb. 12:3 f.⁵

Dodd then goes on to say that John continually mentions a commandment, or a new commandment in this First Epistle. He contends that by this

⁵Dodd, op. cit., p. 85.

John would say to his readers, "Love your brother so much, that you are ready to lay down your life for him." And Dodd points out that there were many occasions in the life of the early church, even as there may be also certain tragic occasions in our day, when Christians perform a literal obedience to this precept.

The purpose of these parallel passages is to show that there is no essential disagreement in John, or in the commentators of John, for that matter, with regard to the source of the New Commandment. On the contrary, these passages point up more clearly, that no matter where we turn, we are led to Christ, who by His life and death has made all things "new."

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

From our study of this problem we reach the following conclusions:

1. To weaken the true meaning of *καινός* in the passage under discussion is not permissible, because nowhere in the New Testament is *καινός* used without meaning something novel: either new, as unused before; new, as unheard of before; or new, with regard to the New Econ. It is evidently in the last class that the use of *καινός* in John 13:34 belongs.

2. To look to the Old Testament commandment of love itself for the answer to our problem is unwarranted, because the commandment to love one another did not change.

3. And yet, to reject the Old Testament completely as being annulled by the New Testament, as Nygren seems prone to do, would be dangerous, and, even, sinful. The Old Testament lays the groundwork and prepares for the New. Without the Old, the New could not be understood. Besides, a meaning for the New Commandment can be found without a drastic rejection of the Old Testament.

4. To look for the "newness" of this commandment outside of the person and work of Christ would be futile, because:

a. *ἐντολή*, as John uses it, refers only to Christ, and the will of God revealed through Him.

b. *καινός* points to Christ, for it is through Him that the New Econ is ushered in, of which this New Commandment is evidently a part.

c. *ἀγάπη* points to Christ, for we cannot fully understand what Christian *ἀγάπη* is, unless and until we consider Christ on the cross, suffering and dying for His enemies.

5. The commandment, then, is "new" in Christ. As Christ brought in His New Creation, and made of believers New Men, so He has also given a

New Commandment, a commandment "put upon a new footing, and clothed with fresh and irresistible power." Christ becomes the new center and focal point for this commandment. By His life and death He gives men a new example to follow, so that, to be obedient to His Commandment, they must be His imitators. Man is not able to understand how much he can, or should, love his neighbor, until he sees Christ on the cross. The Old Testament believer was not fully conscious of the depths to which Christian love must go. He did not know that if a neighbor demanded his vest, he should give him his suit coat, too; that if his neighbor forced him to walk a mile, he should go two; that if his neighbor struck him on the cheek, he should turn the other. He was evidently not conscious of the fact that as an imitator of the Messiah he was obliged to surrender even his life for his neighbor. It might have been true that some good men might have thought of surrendering their lives for a loyal friend, but it had never occurred to any one of them to die, out of love, for his enemy. And yet, so it was that Christ loved, and so it is in this New Era, as Christ revealed through His teaching and His own example, that men must love in obedience to this New Commandment. As without His vicarious atonement there would be no New Creation, and no New Man, so without His death on the cross there would be no true understanding of the Commandment of love. It is, then, in Him, that all things, including this Commandment of love, are new.

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