

THE GRAND ESSENTIAL

(John 13:34-35)

For some years, the hope and prayer of this church has been that we be a lighthouse for those in our community. I share those same dreams. A strong case, however, can be made that a church is better off if it views itself as a ship rather than a lighthouse. A lighthouse lacks mobility while a ship can move to wherever it is most needed. A ship can adapt, literally, to a fluid situation.

Liberty Southern Baptist Church is not a building. It is a community of people. If a tornado were to carry this building away, Liberty Southern would not cease to be.

On Sunday mornings [except for Sundays like today], we are the church gathered, but most of the week, we are the church scattered. Whether you are at work, at home, or out in the community, you are representing your Lord and Liberty Southern.

Years ago, in his book, *In the Grip of Grace*, Max Lucado compared the church to a ship. Let me share just a portion of his chapter entitled, “The Fellowship.”

God has enlisted us in His navy and placed us on His ship . . . This is no cruise ship; it’s a battleship. We aren’t called to a life of leisure; we are called to a life of service. Each of us has a different task. Some, concerned with those who are drowning, are snatching people from the water. Others are occupied with the enemy, so they man the cannons of prayer and worship. Still others devote themselves to the crew, feeding and training the crew members.

Though different, we are the same. Each can tell of a personal encounter with the Captain, for each has received a personal call. He found us among the shanties

of the seaport and invited us to follow Him. Our faith was born at the sight of His fondness, and so we went.

We each followed Him across the gangplank of His grace onto the same boat. There is one Captain and one destination. Though the battle is fierce, the boat is safe, for our Captain is God. The ship will not sink. For that, there is no concern.

There is concern, however, regarding the disharmony of the crew. When we first boarded, we assumed the crew was made up of others like us. But as we've wandered these decks, we've encountered curious converts with curious appearances. Some wear uniforms we've never seen, sporting styles we've never witnessed. "Why do you look the way you do?" we ask them. "Funny," they reply. "We were about to ask the same of you."

The variety of dress is not nearly as disturbing as the plethora of opinions.

Lucado highlights how Christians differ widely in their beliefs and practices, and then he writes:

The consequence is a rocky boat. There is trouble on deck. Fights have broken out. Sailors have refused to speak to each other. There have even been times when one group refused to acknowledge the presence of others on the ship. Most tragically, some adrift at sea have chosen not to board the boat because of the quarreling of the sailors.

"What do we do?" we'd like to ask the Captain. "How can there be harmony on the ship?"

Lucado concludes:

God's ship is a grand vessel. Just as a ship has many rooms, so God's kingdom has room for many opinions.

But just as a ship has one deck, God's kingdom has a common ground: the all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus Christ . . .

Will you pray with me for the day when we come out of our rooms and stand together to salute our Captain? When clusters cease and the chorus commences?

Jesus' final prayer before the cross was for the unity of His followers. Would He offer a prayer that couldn't be answered? I don't think so either.

If Liberty Southern is to be a harmonious fellowship, then there is one indispensable ingredient that has to be present among us. This morning, we are going to look at the words of Jesus and learn more about this Grand Essential. Jesus identifies what it is and how it works in John 13:34-35.

Love is the grand essential for the church to truly be what it is supposed to be and do what it is supposed to do. This passage teaches three things disciples need to know and do.

The Grand Essential Involves a New Precept to Obey

When William Hendriksen translated this passage, instead of using the word *commandment*, he rendered it, "A new precept I give you, that you keep loving one another . . ." He felt *precept* was a more appropriate word because he viewed v. 34 as a rule that is meant to regulate our conduct and attitude toward others.

In our dealings with others, we are to let love guide our actions and decisions. Mutual love should characterize the church, the people of God.

You might wonder, "Why does Jesus call that a 'new' commandment?" All throughout the OT we are taught to love one another. It is helpful to realize that the Greek language has two words for new. One word is **neos** which means,

“lately sprung up.” That is something that is new in time, but that is not the word used here in John. The word that is used is **kainos** which means, “fresh” or “not outworn.” The word **kainos** is used in John 19:41 where we are told that Jesus was laid to rest in “a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid.” It is possible that the tomb was years and years old, but it was not outworn for it had never been used.

This new commandment or new precept is centuries old, but it is as fresh today as it was when Jesus re-issued it 2000 years ago. The command to love one another is never out of date. As disciples, we have been given a new command. It is not new in time but new in experience. You can’t outwear it.

A pair of shoes may last a couple of years if you take care of them. A pair of pants may last a little longer if you don’t outgrow them. A new car might last 7 to 10 years.

How long will love last? It is perpetually new. Do you remember what Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 13, the Love chapter? “Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away . . . And now these remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

There was a poor, old man who lived in a run-down house. He was in ill health and unable to adequately care for himself. Someone gave his name to DHS, and they sent a social worker by to see him. She gave him some literature on proper nutrition and how to insulate his home. She told him that if he would eat right and fix up his house, his condition would improve. Not long after that, a newswoman came by. She interviewed the elderly man and took some film footage of his house for a special news television series she was doing on poverty. She really felt for the old man. His situation bothered her so much that she couldn’t even enjoy her steak at the country club that evening!

Then a politician showed up at the man's door. He was running for re-election. He told the man he thought the conditions in which he was living was a public disgrace, and he would work to pass laws which would put an end to such poverty.

Finally, another old man moved next door to the man in need. This neighbor didn't have much in the way of money, but he did have time and concern. He visited the man just about every day. They played checkers on the front porch. He helped the man fix up his house and winterize it. He took him to the grocery store as needed. When spring came, they planted a garden together.

In time, the man got better. The man was not helped by **the knowledge** of the social worker, nor by **the sympathy** of the newswoman, nor by **the promises** of the politician. But **he was helped by the love of his neighbor.**

Jesus has given us a new precept by which we are to live our lives, it is the law of love. Are you living and ordering your life by love? Are you seeking to express love to others? Let me get a little more specific. What is that person's name?

You can't love people generally. You must love them one-by-one. Are we truly extending love to one another?

Apart from someone in your own family, who have you tried minister to who is a member of this congregation? Let's work at being disciples who obey the new precept.

The Grand Essential Involves a New Pattern to Follow

In v. 34, Jesus gave us a command, but then He got more specific and told us how to fulfill that command. We are to love one another as He has loved us. He is the model we are to copy or the pattern we are to follow. Earlier in this chapter, Jesus illustrated that very truth. Look at 13:1,3-5,12-15. Jesus didn't let pride or position get in the way of showing His love

through service. His love found expression in humble service to His disciples.

The first thing we notice about Jesus' pattern of loving is that He met the needs of people. If you are going to love like Jesus, you must discover and meet the needs of others. Jesus didn't love in word; He loved in deed. It is not enough to:

think loving thoughts,
to feel loving feelings,
or to say loving words.

To love like Jesus requires that we love through service. If we are not being a servant to others, we are not following the new pattern that Jesus left.

We discover another aspect of the way Jesus loved as we consider John 15:13. Jesus lived up to that verse when He went to the cross. Jesus showed his love through **service**, but He also showed it through **sacrifice**. John tells us about the sacrificial nature of God's love in 1 John 4:9-11. Let's look at that passage. It teaches us that the one who loves is the one who gives of himself or herself. It costs something to love.

One of the shortest reigns in the history of the British monarchy was that of King Edward the VIII. He assumed the throne of England on January 20, 1936. He was the first bachelor king in 176 years. Not long after becoming the king, Edward gave a marriage proposal to Mrs. Wallis Simpson, a U.S. citizen, who at the time was in the process of getting her second divorce. Edward's intention to marry a two-time divorced woman created a storm of protest. The powers that be wouldn't allow it. Edward, therefore, chose to abdicate. He, in effect, resigned as King. He gave up his throne so that he could marry Wallis Simpson. They were wed in June of 1937. Great love and sacrifice were involved in Edward's decision to give up his throne.

That sacrifice, however, hardly compares with what Jesus

did. Jesus, the Kings of Kings left His throne in glory in order to die for His Bride, the Church.

Jesus gave up His throne in order to demonstrate His love. What are you willing to give up to show love to others? Are you willing to give up some of your time, some of your energy, some of your money, some of your pride? It costs to love others.

We have a **new precept**: We are to love one another. We **have a new pattern**: **We are to love** as Jesus loved us. Jesus showed His love through service and sacrifice.

Will we do so, as well?

The Grand Essential Involves a New Proof to Offer

Look at v. 35. Jesus taught His disciples that if they would truly display love for each other that they would, at the same time, be demonstrating to the world that they belong to Him.

What is the best way that Christians can show the world that we follow Christ? Is it by going to church? Most people don't seem too impressed by our church attendance. They talk about those hypocrites down at the church. Can we show we belong to Christ by living a clean moral life? There are plenty of other cults and religions that stress moral living. How about putting an "I Love Jesus" bumper sticker on your car? That won't help much if you speed and cut in front of people when you drive.

The best way to demonstrate that we are followers of Christ is to love our Christian family as He loved. If we would love one another the way Jesus loves us, there would be no doubt in the minds of the world as to whom we belong.

Tertullian was born between 150 and 160 A.D. He was a student of literature, law, and philosophy. He became a Christian in about 185 A.D., and he became a strong defender of the Christian faith. He wrote arguments against the enemies of the church, and he was a champion for the truth of

Christianity. In one of his works, he wrote, “It is our care for the helpless, our practice of lovingkindness, that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents. ‘Look!’ they say. ‘How they love one another! Look how they are prepared to die for one another.’”

About the time of Tertullian, there was one unbeliever who had observed Christians, and he wrote, “It is incredible to see the fervor with which the people of that religion help each other in their wants. They spare nothing. Their first legislator [Jesus] has put it into their heads that they are brethren.”

Folks, we are brothers and sisters. When lost people who live in Enid look at us, and they do, let me assure you of that, what do they say? Do they say, “Look at those folks! Look at how they fuss at and feud with one another; look at how they backbite, gossip, and complain.” Or do they say, “Look at how they care for one another and meet one another’s needs! Surely, they must know Jesus.”

Brothers and sisters, let’s work at giving evidence to a doubting world that Jesus is alive, and we know Him personally.

Love. It is the Grand Essential. As we allow love to exist, grow, and multiply within our fellowship, we are going to **obey the new precept, follow the new pattern, and offer that new proof.**

Let me tell you Bill’s story; maybe you have heard it. Bill had wild hair, wore a T-shirt with holes in it, jeans, and no shoes. That was, literally, his wardrobe during his entire four years of college.

Bill, however, was brilliant, very, very smart. He became a Christian while attending college. Across the street from the campus was a well-dressed, extremely conservative church. They wanted to develop a ministry to the students, but they weren’t sure how to go about it.

One day Bill decided to attend there on a Sunday morning. He walked in with no shoes, jeans, T-shirt, and his wild hair. The service had already started; so, Bill started down the aisle looking for a seat. The church was completely packed, and he couldn't find a seat. By now people were looking a bit uncomfortable, but no one said a thing.

Bill got closer and closer and closer to the pulpit, and when he realized there were no seats, he just sat down right on the carpet. Now, that would be perfectly acceptable behavior at a college fellowship, but I can assure you that had never happened in this church before! By now the people were really uptight, and the tension in the air was thick.

Suddenly, the minister realized that from way at the back of the church, a deacon was slowly making his way toward Bill. That deacon was in his eighties, had silver-gray hair, a three-piece suit, and a pocket watch. He was a godly man—very elegant, very dignified, very courtly. He walked with a cane, and as he started making his way toward this boy, everyone thought to themselves, “You can't blame him for what he's going to do. How can you expect a man of his age and of his background to understand some college kid on the floor?”

It took a long time for the man to reach the boy. The church was utterly silent except for the clicking of the man's cane. All eyes were focused on him; you couldn't even hear anyone breathing. The people were thinking, “The minister can't even preach the sermon until the deacon does what he has to do.”

And now, they saw this elderly man drop his cane on the floor. With great difficulty he lowered himself and sat down next to Bill so the college student wouldn't have to worship alone. Everyone choked up with the emotion. When the minister gained control he said, “What I'm about to preach, you will never remember. What you have just seen, you will never forget.”

Folks, let's be a church like that. Let's go out of our way to make others feel welcome and go out of our way to express

love for all who are or who may become a part of this fellowship.

All four gospel accounts recorded the time Jesus fed the 5000 with five loaves of bread and two fish. After He did so, He sent His disciples across the lake of Galilee while He went up on to the mountain to pray. On their way, the disciples encountered a storm. The Bible says that Jesus came walking on the water to His disciples. When the disciples let Jesus into their boat, the wind stopped. Be certain of this one fact, Jesus wants to enter the boat of your life, but He wants to board our boat, not as a passenger, but as the Captain. Jesus wants to be the Captain of your life, not merely a passenger.

There is, however, another sense in which, Jesus isn't as concerned with climbing into your boat as He is of having you board His vessel, the Church. God wants you to become a crew member of the Fellowship. Remember, the Fellowship isn't a cruise ship; it is a battleship. Are you ready to become a fellow soldier and serve under His command?

It is time to get into the ship, and it is time to love one another until we reach our final port. I invite you this morning to do those very things: come under His command, board His ship, and love your fellow sailors.