

# The Heart of the Matter

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If you knew for certain you only had a few hours left on earth, how would you spend those last precious hours? What would be the most important thing you'd want to do? I think I would want to tell my dear ones how much I love them and give some instructions about what I would want them to do going forward – to help comfort and prepare them.

Sometimes people will give what is called a “deathbed confession” or provide their final wishes or last will and testament in their final precious moments. In any case, this is a time when you want to truly get to “the heart of the matter.”

This is exactly what Jesus did on the night before his beating, crucifixion and death. Immediately after their Master and Lord humbled himself like a common servant and washed his disciples' feet, Jesus gave them (and all future followers by extension) a new command.

## A NEW COMMAND – LOVE DEEPLY AND FULLY

*“I give you a new command: Love each other deeply and fully. Remember the ways that I have loved you, and demonstrate your love for others in those same ways. Everyone will know you as My followers if you demonstrate your love to others” (John 13:34-35, The Voice).*

Christ gave a new command – a mandate. I chose this Scripture from the Voice version of the Bible because it conveys the idea of loving others “deeply and fully.” Many versions say “if you love one another” but this love command of Christ goes far beyond simply loving our family, friends or other Christians. Jesus is talking about loving our neighbors as ourselves, which we know from his parable of the good Samaritan, means showing love toward everyone. On the night before his death, Jesus gets to the very core of the gospel – his new command is “the heart of the matter.”

The Greek word used for “love” here is *agapao* (verb). It refers to the supernatural love of God, but that is only part of the meaning. It also refers to the

love which arises from a keen sense of the value and worth of the object of our love. When Jesus commanded his disciples (then and for all time) to love others, part of that command is to deeply appreciate the worth and value in others.

It can be challenging to recognize value and worth in others. Sometimes it is even hard to see the value and worth in ourselves! Maybe part of the problem is that we don't really believe, deep inside, that God loves or values us. Or we may believe God loves us, but that we must keep doing good works in order to earn and keep his love.

## REMEMBER THE WAYS I HAVE LOVED YOU

In the second part of John 13:34, Jesus said *“Remember the ways I have loved you, and demonstrate your love for others in those same ways.”* When he said this to the disciples, he had just humbled himself to serve them by washing their feet. This must have been part of what Christ had in mind when he said the disciples should demonstrate that same type of love to others.

But at this point in the story, the disciples had not yet witnessed the greatest act of love that Christ would demonstrate for them and for all mankind – *“to lay down his life for his friends”* (see John 15:12-13).

What are some ways we can lay down our lives for others? Our lives consist of our time, and time is money. We can spend our time and resources helping others and praying for others. Praying for others is important not only to the person we pray for, but for us too – it helps us develop a closer, intimate relationship with God.

As humans, we don't naturally possess this sacrificial type of love, and we can't “fake it” or work it up on our own strength. Godly love flows through the Holy Spirit as we surrender to Christ and allow him to live in us and love through us. Allowing God's love to flow through us toward others is truly “the heart of the matter.” □

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