

John 15:9-17

9 As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. 11 I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. 12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. 16 You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. 17 I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another (NRSV).

In the Gospel of John we see that love is a familiar topic. I prefer to call this biblical specific type of love divine love. God's love is agape love. It is love that is pure, cares for the well being of others, and wants little for the self. There is a contrast in the Bible between good and bad, love and hate. This portion of the Gospel of John flows from the good to the bad; from the love commandment to the world's hatred. God gives love to the world and the world responds with hatred.

Jesus continues a long farewell discourse after the Last Supper and on the way to Gethsemane; this is before the arrest, persecution, death, and resurrection. The vine imagery shows the flow of divine love from God to us. Jesus said "I have said these things to you." Jesus is insisting that this lesson is very important. He said these things for a specific reason; so that we will abide in his love. For Jesus it is all about the love. Jesus does not just give the commandment to love, he emphasizes it. This is not just a commandment, this is his commandment. Jesus does not give a dozen commandments; he gives one commandment that is the foundation of all the others. The commandment has a specific quality that is required; we are to love others like Jesus does.

Mother's Day is a family time, a time for love and expressing appreciation. It is the little things that mean a lot. I encourage you to take a break from the business of life, consider all the little things someone has done for you and appreciate the thought that went into it. On Mother's Day, I can't help but notice the parallelism between divine love and a mother's love. Jesus says there is no greater love than that which is sacrificial. That is what mothers will do. Jesus was specific – this is his commandment. When we think of sin, we think of what we should and should not do but we tend to focus on the Ten Commandments. Now Jesus has a new commandment. After lots of lessons and years of teaching, there is only one commandment from Jesus. We must love one another. There is no being a Christian without this commandment. It is easy to claim to be in the Jesus group. Words are easy. It is much harder to practice our faith as it is taught by Jesus, especially the commandment to love others as yourself.

When I first moved to Lynchburg, I saw a man with a Bible in his hand. He stopped me on my way to the store. He tried to push his version of the Bible on me. He preached sin and condemnation instead of the love of Lord. I was too young to engage in theological discussion. I wondered if he really understood the Bible because it was

apparent to me that he had a limited interpretation. The man talked about the things I should do and should not do and I need to repent or be condemned. And Jesus said “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” I saw a woman praising the Lord. She was smiling and happy and proud to be telling me how blessed she is. I wonder if she lives by the teaching of Jesus or if this is just her public persona. The Christian is not concerned with impressing others; the Christian loves others as they are. When you love others, you do not attempt to impress or force your opinions on others. If everyone was the Christian that they claim to be we would have peace not war.

Jesus spent years teaching his disciples. Now he concludes his lessons to them by emphasizing love. The climax of Jesus teaching is love just like the climax of Jesus life is based on salvation. Jesus is all about love. The theme of love is emphasized in the Bible because God wants it. God looks upon the creation as good. God loves what God created. However, love was absent during Jesus time here on earth. It is into this brutal world that Jesus offered himself. Jesus made love a model for humanity. Without it we become so selfish we are bent upon self destruction. There is no better way to live than to live your life sharing the love of Christ. With the specific detail – just as Jesus has loved us, we are to love others. This is sincere, unselfish, deep caring love for the well being of others. The commandment to love is not based on our standards but Gods. We are not to be like everyone else in the world, we are to be like Christ.