

THE ELEVENTH COMMANDMENT

Former President Regan told a humorous story during the last days of his administration. It was about Alexander Dumas. It seems that Dumas and a friend had a severe argument. The matter got so out of hand that one challenged the other to a duel. Both Dumas and his friend were superb marksmen. Fearing that both men might fall in such a duel they resolved to draw straws instead. Whoever drew the short straw would then be pledged to shoot himself.

Dumas was the unlucky one. He drew the short straw. With a heavy sigh, he picked up his pistol and trudged into the library and closed the door, leaving the company of friends who had gathered to witness the non-duel outside. In a few moments a solitary shot was fired. All the curious pressed into the library. They found Dumas standing with his pistol still smoking. "An amazing thing just happened," said Dumas. "I missed."

I am amazed how many Christians have been in the church all their lives and still have missed the Gospel. So many folks still live in the Old Testament, bound by legalisms, restricted by the "Thou shalt nots" without being empowered by the "Thou shalt." Some are experts at the Ten Commandments, but absolute failures at the eleventh and most important of all.

Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men shall know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." NOTE, FIRST OF ALL, THAT THIS IS WHAT CHRIST MOST DESIRES OUT OF US. THAT WE LOVE ONE ANOTHER. We may tithe. We may teach Sunday School. We may sing in the choir, serve on the administrative board of the church, and even make visits on behalf of the church. All of these things are wonderful. But if we do not love, we have missed the Gospel.

Lucy stands with her arms folded and a resolute expression on her face, while Charlie Brown pleads, "Lucy, you must be more loving. This world really needs love. You have to let yourself love to make this world a better place in which to live!" Lucy whirls around angrily causing Charlie Brown to do a backwards flip and screams at him: "Look, block-head the world I love. It's people I can't stand." Some of us resemble that remark. We love the world. It's the people we can't stand. Love who? Why everybody. Nothing could be clearer from the Gospels than that. We are to love not only our immediate neighbors but the cashier who checks our groceries and the highway patrolman who stops us on highway 36 as well as the obnoxious people who cross our paths every day. We are

to put our faith into action through loving deeds. As someone once said, "We are judged by our actions, not our intentions. We may have a heart of gold- but so does a hard-boiled egg."

Comedian Jerry Clower tells a story about Christian love in action. Two Christian businessmen were having lunch in a downtown restaurant. The waitress serving their table dumped a bowl of hot soup right over one of these businessmen. Everybody gasped and stared. As Clower tells it, "They couldn't wait for the manager to run out and fire this lady. They just couldn't wait for this man, standing there, dripping, with his suit ruined, to read this girl the riot act, but the fellow looked at that waitress and said, ' Young lady, I'm so sorry this happened to you. I know it embarrasses you."

How would you have handled that situation? Can you love as the Master would have us love? Can any of us do that? How? We must examine our text carefully. Note that Jesus says, "As I have loved you, love also one another." If you took all the psychology texts, boiled them down to their essential truths and from that extensive effort sought to produce one statement about the character of man that would be the most profound statement ever uttered, you could not improve on this simple statement. "As I have loved you, love one another.

THIS BRINGS US TO OUR SECOND POINT. THE SOURCE OF OUR LOVE IS CHRIST. The commandment to love is not merely another legalistic requirement. Rather, it is the natural response to the love we receive from Christ. That love is an unconditional love. "Just as I am without one plea," we sing, and if we understand that we are loved just as we are, with no strings attached, it can transform our lives. How desperately we need to be loved unconditionally.

We love because he first loved us. In our hymnal there is a song we sing titled, "Love came down at Christmas..." and that is true. Not that love was not already in the world, but until Christ we did not see it walking, talking, and serving others. You see, everything we need to know about right and wrong is in the Old Testament. The problem is that the emphasis is on the negative. We are told what we should not do, but not as clearly what we should. As one young lady commented about the Ten Commandments, "They don't tell you what you ought to do. They just put ideas into your head." You can take that a number of ways, but she is right. The Old Testament includes the commandments to love God and to love ones neighbor. However, we did not see a loving God in action until there was Jesus. He showed us the content and the character of love. Then he went where no one has ever gone before. He gave up his own life on Calvary to show us just how far the Father will go to win back His lost children. When we understand that love and make it our own, then we are able to love as Christ calls us to love. But there is one more thing which must be said.

OUR LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER IS OUR PRIMARY WITNESS TO THE WORLD. Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Educator Jeffery Holland tells about a preschool teacher who faced what she thought was "burnout." She was a committed teacher whose heart particularly went out to the so-called "disadvantaged children." She had begun to despair over some of the children who seemed so lost, so limited, and in some cases, so neglected at home. In her growing frustration she vacillated between the feeling that there was something wrong with her, or that there was something wrong with this current crop of preschoolers. Then, suddenly, her mother passed away.

It was necessary for her to take a week off from her teaching duties to attend her mother's funeral. Following the funeral she needed some time alone to deal with her feelings. Her frustrations at the preschool seemed like an even heavier burden at this point in her life. After a weekend of aimless shopping, puttering in the garden and watching TV, she realized she must return to her classroom. She felt more like a soldier going into battle than a teacher of preschoolers. The first day back was about what she expected. Her hurt and despair produced resentment which she kept carefully hidden. She went through the paces like the competent professional she was. She smiled at the right times and was admirably patient considering the environment and her raw feelings.

But then it happened. She had come around the corner to discover Rachel picking the last chrysanthemum from the pot in the hall. Rachel, by the way, was the most distant, most disruptive child in the class. In a stern, trembling voice the teacher demanded, "Rachel, what are you doing?" Rachel held out in her little hand the flowers she had already picked. "Mrs. Terrell, you used to be like a mother. Would these flowers help you to be like a mother again? I know you are fussed in your mind. Wouldn't you like some flowers?" Mrs. Terrell thought, fussed in my mind? You mean it shows? To a five-year-old? So she asked, "Rachel, what is a mother like?" Rachel replied, "A mother is like you used to be, a mother likes being with children." "But Rachel," said Mrs. Terrell, "I like being with children. I've just... well, I've been.... Well, Rachel, my mother passed away and..." Rachel meekly interrupted, "You mean she died?" "Yes, Rachel, she died." Rachel looked up at her teacher and asked, "Did she live until she died?" Mrs. Terrell thought what kind of question is that? She said, "Well honey of course. All people live until they die; they..." Rachel interrupted her again. "Oh no they don't Mrs. Terrell. Some people seem to die while they are still walking around. They stop being what they used to be. Mrs. Terrell, don't die just because your mother did. Be alive while you are alive."

Out of the mouths of babes. How do we witness to the world that Christ is alive? We do it by being alive ourselves. How do we witness to the world that God is love? We do it by loving one

another. We witness to the world that Christ lives in our heart every time we perform any act of kindness to another. Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, that you love one another."

So, how about you? Have you missed the point of it all? The primary requirement that Christ asks out of us is that we love. We love because he first loved us. How can you tell if someone lives close to Christ? By their love. Love is our primary witness to the world. So today prepare yourself to share that love, the love of Christ, with all the people you come in contact with and maybe, just maybe, they will say "That person truly is a disciple of Jesus."