

JOHN 15:12-13

Most of us have heard of the Ten Commandments. Well, my message today is about the Eleventh Commandment.

Some of you may have heard somebody joke about an Eleventh Commandment being "Don't get caught!" or something like that. That's not what I'm going to talk about this afternoon.

I'm going to talk about the real Eleventh Commandment. There really is an Eleventh Commandment. We find it in the Bible in John 15:12-13, where Jesus says:

- 12 This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.
- 13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

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What did Jesus mean when He told us to love one another? I can say, "I love my wife." I can also say "I love ice cream." I clearly don't mean the same kind of love in both of those sentences.

The English language is kind of weak when it comes to defining the word "love". The Greek language of the New Testament is better: it had four separate words for "love".

EROS meant physical, sexual love. It's the word that the English word "erotic" comes from. This is not the word Jesus used in John 15.

STORGE meant the love that came with a sense of duty. Mother's and fathers love their children: that is their duty as parents. As beautiful as mother-love is, this is still not the word Jesus used.

PHILEO meant brotherly love, the love between friends who share common thoughts and goals. But as right as that might sound, Jesus didn't use PHILEO in John 15:12-13 either.

Jesus used the word AGAPE. AGAPE meant a self-sacrificing love; a love that considered its object of the greatest value, and well worth sacrificing for.

EROS means you love somebody because you want them. STORGE means you love someone because you're supposed

to. PHILEO means you love someone because they love you back. But AGAPE means you love someone simply because you have decided to love them.

EROS, STORGE, and PHILEO are emotions. AGAPE is a decision: it is an act of the will, not just a feeling that may come or go.

It is AGAPE that Jesus told us we are to express one to another: a decision to love our brothers and sisters in Christ whether they seem very loveable or not.

And we are to love them the way that Jesus loved us. For example:

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A little boy was told by his doctor that he could save his sister's life by giving her some blood. The six-year-old girl was near death, a victim of a disease from which the boy had made a marvelous recovery two years earlier. Her only chance for restoration was a blood transfusion from someone who had previously conquered the illness. Since the two children had the same rare blood type, the boy was the ideal donor.

"Johnny, would you like to give your blood for Mary?" the doctor asked.

The boy hesitated. His lower lip started to tremble. Then he smiled, and said, "Sure, Doc. I'll give my blood for my sister."

Soon the two children were wheeled into the operating room -- Mary, pale and thin; Johnny, robust and the picture of health. Neither spoke, but when their eyes met, Johnny grinned.

As his blood siphoned into Mary's veins, one could almost see new life come into her tired body. The ordeal was almost over when Johnny's brave little voice broke the silence, "Say, Doc, when do I die?"

It was only then that the doctor realized what the moment of hesitation, the trembling of the lip, had meant earlier. Little Johnny actually thought that in giving his blood to his sister he was giving up his life! And in that brief moment, he had made his great decision!

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Here's another example of how Jesus wants us to love one

another:

A small orphaned boy lived with his grandmother. One night their house caught fire. The grandmother, trying to rescue the little boy asleep upstairs, perished in the smoke and flames. A crowd gathered around the burning house. The boy's cries for help were heard above the crackling of the blaze. No one seemed to know what to do, for the entire front of the house was one big mass of flames.

Suddenly a stranger rushed from the crowd and circled to the back where he spotted an iron pipe that reached an upstairs window. He disappeared for a minute, then reappeared with the boy in his arms. Amid the cheers of the crowd, he climbed down the hot pipe as the boy hung around his neck.

Weeks later a public hearing was held in the town hall to determine in whose custody the boy would be placed. Each person wanting the boy was allowed to speak briefly. The first man said, "I have a big farm. Everybody needs the out-of-doors."

The second man told of the advantages he could provide, "I'm a teacher. I have a large library. The boy would get a good education."

Others spoke. Finally the richest man in the community said, "I'm wealthy. I could give the boy everything mentioned tonight: farm, education, and more, including money and travel. I'd like him in my home."

The chairman asked, "Anyone else like to say a word?" From the back seat rose a stranger who had slipped in unnoticed. As he walked toward the front, deep suffering showed on his face. Reaching the front of the room, he stood directly in front of the little boy. Slowly the stranger removed his hands from his pockets. A gasp went up from the crowd. The little boy, whose eyes had been focused on the floor until now, looked up. The man's hands were terribly scarred. Suddenly the boy emitted a cry of recognition. Here was the man who had saved his life. His hands were scarred from climbing up and down the hot pipe.

With a leap the boy threw himself around the stranger's neck and held on for life.

The farmer rose and left. The teacher too. Then the rich man. Everyone departed, leaving the boy and his rescuer who had won him without a word. Those marred hands spoke more effectively than any words.

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Jesus was willing to die so that we might live in Heaven with Him forever. But, even more than that, he has compassion on us and cares about our smallest needs as well as our largest. And we are to love one another the same way.

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Back in the 1960's, Bill was a student at Portland University in Portland, Oregon. He was brilliant and looked like he was always pondering the esoteric. His hair was always messy, and he never wore any shoes. Rain, sleet, or snow, Bill was always barefoot.

While he was attending college, he became a Christian. At that time, a well-dressed, middle class church across the street from the campus wanted to develop more of a ministry to the students. They weren't quite sure how to go about it, but they tried to make them feel welcome.

One Sunday, Bill decided to worship there. He walked into this church, wearing his jeans, t-shirt, and, of course, no shoes. People looked a bit uncomfortable, but no one said anything.

So Bill began walking down the aisle looking for a seat. The church was quite crowded that Sunday, so as he got down to the front pew and realized there were no seats, he just squatted on the carpet -- perfectly acceptable behavior at a college fellowship, but perhaps unnerving for a church congregation. The tension in the air became so thick one could slice it.

Suddenly, one of the elderly deacons began walking down the aisle toward the boy. Was he going to scold Bill? Those who saw him coming said to themselves, "You can't blame him. Who'd ever guess that Bill is a Christian? And his world is too distant from Bill's to understand. You can't blame him for what he's going to do."

As the old deacon kept walking slowly down the aisle, the church became utterly silent, all eyes were focused on him, and everybody held their breath. When the man reached Bill, with some difficulty he lowered himself and sat down next to him on the carpet. He and Bill worshipped together on the floor that Sunday. I understand there was not a dry eye in the congregation.

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And, don't ever think that little kindnesses aren't important. There is a true story which was told by the well-known preacher Norman Vincent Peale: The story was about a girl named Ursula who had come from Switzerland to live in an American home, to learn English in return for child care and housekeeping. Ursula was an ordinary girl who provided an ordinary act of kindness.

Not having much money herself, but realizing the vast extent of poverty in New York, she decided to buy a dress and give it to some child in the ghetto. At the department store she asked the doorman what part of the city was poorest, got directions from a policeman to Harlem, walked a number of blocks, and eventually found a bell-ringer from the Salvation Army who offered to help her find a little girl in need of a dress.

Hailing a taxi, the two traveled on together until they came to a tenement house where the Salvation Army man knew of a poor family with a girl. Ursula asked the man to get her package to the door, ring the bell, and then leave the anonymous gift. The next day, after some questioning, she hesitantly told the family with whom she was staying about the journey she had made.

Peale gives this simple story of a generous girl a new meaning. This girl lived with the Peale family. Her small, inconsequential gift meant very little in the war against poverty. But her gift from the heart has become an inspiration to many by the retelling of the story.

Peale concludes, "Strange isn't it? A shy Swiss girl, alone in a great impersonal city. You would think that nothing she could do would affect anyone. And yet, by trying to give love away, she influenced many people: herself, the Salvation Army man, the tenement family, the taxi driver, my own family, myself and perhaps, through the retelling of her story, she will influence people all over the world.

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Hallelujah, Amen!

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