

Love – Agape and the Commandments of Jesus

The following is not an exhaustive study but a quick scan through the New Testament.

Love God:

Jesus never commanded His disciples to love God or Himself. The only time He references the “great commandment” is when the scribe/ lawyer confronts Him to test Him. This is the greatest commandment of the Law but not the new kingdom. (Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-29)

Instead of being commanded to love Him, we are commanded to abide in Jesus’ love by keeping His commandments. We show our love for God and Jesus by keeping Jesus’ commandments (John 14:15, 21, 23-24; 15:9-10, 14). Jesus’ commandments come from the Father, so when we keep Jesus’ commandments, we keep the Father’s commandments (John 17:6). When we keep Jesus’ (and the Father’s commandments) we show that we love the Father and the Son.

We only truly know God by keeping His commandments, and this is the only demonstration that we truly know Him (1 John 2:3-6).

Love one another:

Love God is a law of the old covenant, not a law in the new covenant kingdom. Jesus replaced the old covenant with a new covenant at the last supper with His disciples. He discusses this new covenant and new kingdom laws in John 13 – 17. He states three times that He gives a new commandment for the new covenant after Judas left so that He is speaking just to His true disciples – love one another just as Jesus loved His disciples (John 13:34, 15:12, 17). He emphasizes how important this commandment is for His new covenant kingdom by stating it three times in this short period of time.

John, who was the closest to Jesus, expands on loving God by loving one another. 1 John 2:3-11, John says we cannot abide in His light if we hate (don’t love) our brother. John reiterates Jesus’ commandment to love one another: 1 John 3:11-24; 4:7-21, 5:1-3; 2 John 1:5-6. John never states that we are commanded to love the Father but says we show our love for Him by loving our brothers in word and deed.

Peter, who was also at the last supper, reminds his readers to fervently love one another from the heart and to love the brotherhood (1 Peter 1:22, 2:17, 4:8-10). But he never states that we must love the Father or God.

Paul never states in his letters that we are commanded to love God or even that we should love God. However, he repeatedly tells them to love one another, to put on love, to bear with one another, to forgive one another, to look out for the interests of others, and all the other “one anothers.”

Love your neighbor:

Likewise, the only time Jesus refers to this “second commandment” is in the interaction with the scribe who tested Him about the greatest commandment in the law. In fact, He replaces “love your neighbor” by elevating it to “love your enemies” (Matthew 5:43-48). He says, “The law says love your neighbor, but I say love your enemies.” That is a major statement, that His word is above the Law of Moses. He says the Law of Moses is not enough for His new Kingdom.

As major as this commandment is to love your enemies, He never repeats it outside of this context. And He does not reference it at His last meal but instead states three times to love one another.

Revelation 2:4-5 – first love and first deeds – in light of the above passages, maybe the first love the Ephesians let go of was love for one another by focusing too much on purity of doctrine, and they needed to return to loving one another so they could abide in Christ and His love.

Therefore, according to Jesus’ words, the truly Great Commandment is love one another.