

John 13:34

Pastor: John 13:34: Jesus Christ gave us a new law of love to replace the laws of the Old Testament.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”

Many people can be caught completely off guard, or not quite know how to react, when various Christian teachers or pastors communicate that the Messiah came to give a new law, a law that is only of “love.” The challenge is not with the Messiah’s emphasis on the imperative of love; the challenge is that for anyone who reads the Bible, the commands to love God and neighbor were given in the Torah or Law of Moses, before Yeshua spoke this to His Disciples at the Last Supper:

“You shall love HASHEM, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your resources” (Deuteronomy 6:5, ATS).

“You shall not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge against the members of your people; you shall love your fellow as yourself—I am HASHEM” (Leviticus 19:18, ATS).

So what is intended by Yeshua saying, “a new commandment” (*Entolēn kainēn*, Ἐντολὴν καινὴν)? Yeshua’s statement of John 13:34 was not adding a 614th commandment to the traditional Jewish 613 Torah commandments.

There are a variety of ways that John 13:34 has been taken by commentators of the Gospel of John, which do properly recognize and acknowledge how the Torah originally directed God’s people to love neighbor. The further statement of 1 John 2:7 notably implies, “Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard.” Yeshua’s word of John 13:34 of a “new commandment,” has frequently been taken to (1) involve either the quality of love that He directed His followers to have, one of self-sacrifice as He was preparing to be sacrificed, or (2) that the “new commandment” of love takes on new dimensions with His establishment of the prophesied New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27). The chart below has catalogued a number of significant opinions:

JOHN 13:34	
A NEW QUALITY OF LOVE	“NEW COMMANDMENT” TO BE ASSOCIATED WITH “NEW COVENANT”
<p>“The commandment of love was not entirely new: all the law and the prophets were summed up in the twin commandments...{quoting Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18}...but by his teaching and still more by his example...Jesus imparted a new depth of meaning to it.”¹ F.F. Bruce</p>	<p>“This commandment is <i>new</i>, not because it is intrinsically different from the law of love of the Old Testament. Nor is it new because of Jesus’ redefining of ‘neighbour’ (Lk. 10:29-37), though that is certainly significant. The ‘newness’ lies rather in its being the law of the ‘new covenant’ which Jesus is to establish through his death, and which he has so recently proclaimed during the supper they have shared {referencing: Luke 22:20; Jeremiah 31:31; Ezekiel 34:25}. The new covenant brings with it the new life in the Holy Spirit which will as never before enable the fulfilling of the law. It is ‘new’ also in the sheer</p>

¹ Bruce, *John*, 294.

	<p>depth and demand of the summons to love which Jesus issues."² Bruce Milne</p>
<p>"The <i>new command</i> is simple enough for a toddler to memorize and appreciate, profound enough that the most mature believers are repeatedly embarrassed at how poorly they comprehend it and put it into practice: <i>Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.</i> The standard of comparison is Jesus' love (<i>cf.</i> v. 1), just exemplified in the footwashing (<i>cf.</i> vv. 12-17); but since the footwashing points to his death (vv. 6-10), these same disciples but a few days later would begin to appreciate a standard of love they would explore throughout their pilgrimage. The more we recognize the depth of our own sin, the more we recognize the love of the Saviour; the more we appreciate the love of the Saviour, the higher his standard appears; the higher his standard appears, the more we recognize in our selfishness, our innate self-centredness, the depth of our own sin."³ D.A. Carson</p>	<p>"Its 'newness' would appear to consist in its being the Law of the new order, brought about by the redemption of God in and through Christ....The expression 'new order' is deliberately ambiguous. We have in mind the era of the new covenant, established through the sacrificial self-giving of Christ and his resurrection to rule. The establishment of the new covenant is integral to the traditions of the Last Supper (<i>cf.</i> Mark 14:24 par.)...The commands of the law were issued to Israel as their part in God's covenant with them, involving their response to his taking them to be his people whom he had 'redeemed' from the slavery of Egypt (<i>cf.</i> esp. Exod 19:3-6). So the 'new command' may be viewed as the obligation of the people of the new covenant in response to the redemptive act of God and his gracious election which made them his new people."⁴ George R. Beasley-Murray</p>
<p>"In the OT the Israelites were commanded to love their neighbor as they loved themselves (Lv. 19:18), but Jesus said to his disciples, <i>As I have loved you, so you must love one another.</i> This raised the ante considerably. The measure of love for their neighbour was no longer their love for themselves, but Jesus' love for them. The Fourth Gospel speaks of Jesus' love for the disciples in three places (1; 15:9, 13), a love that led him to lay down his life for them. Now he said they should love one another in the same way (<i>cf.</i> 1 Jn. 3:16). Jesus' love command was 'new' because it demanded a new kind of love, a love like his own."⁵ Colin G. Kruse</p>	
<p>"Love itself was hardly a new commandment (Lev 19:18), as the Johannine tradition itself recognized (1 John 2:7; 2 John 1:5)...Still, loving one's neighbor as oneself was such a radical demand that biblical tradition might depict its actual occurrence only in the most intimate relationships (1 Sam 18:1, 3; 20:17). In fact, Jesus' commands to love God and</p>	

² Milne, 206.

³ Carson, *John*, 484.

⁴ Beasley-Murray, *John*, 247.

⁵ Colin G. Kruse, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 293.

one another in the Farewell Discourse (13:34-35; 14:15-16, 21) echo the language of the essential substance of the law of Moses, as in Mark 12:29-34....What is new here is the standard for this love: ‘as I have loved you’ (13:34; cf. 1 John 2:8). By laying down his life for others, Jesus loved the disciples more than his own life (11:5; 13:1).”⁶
Craig S. Keener

“Jesus’ ‘new command’ to his followers to love each other as he has loved them constitutes the third major topic. This will be the mark of his disciples (cf. Matt. 5:43-48; Rom. 8:37; Rev. 1:5). The command to love one’s neighbor was not new. Love within the community was also highly regarded at Qumran (e.g., 1QS 1:10; cf. Josephus, *J.W.* 2.8.2§119), and neighbor love was emphasized by the first-century rabbi Hillel. What was new was Jesus’ command for his disciples to love one another *as he has loved them*—laying down their lives. This rule of self-sacrificial, self-giving, selfless love, a unique quality of love inspired by Jesus’ own love for the disciples, will serve as the foundational ethic for the new messianic community.”⁷
Andreas J. Köstenberger

Today’s Messianic people will be more inclined than not, to consider Yeshua’s word about a “new commandment” in John 13:34, to be connected to the New Covenant promises of the Torah being supernaturally transcribed onto the human heart via God’s Spirit—something which involves more than just the love command. Still, it is textually appropriate to recognize the “new commandment” as being an expansion of the Torah commandment to love neighbor, per the direction, “that you love one another, even as I have loved you” (*hina agapate allēlous, kathōs ēgapēsa humas*, ἵνα ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους, καθὼς ἠγάπησα ὑμᾶς). This would not be an annulment of the Torah’s instruction by any means—but that Yeshua’s love requirement requires His own to emulate Him, particularly in matters of service and self-sacrifice for fellow brothers and sisters in the faith.

⁶ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 924.

⁷ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), pp 423-424.