

John 13:31-35 – “Some Things for Believers Only”

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Intro: While the Scriptures have much to say to all men everywhere, there are certain things that we are given in Scripture that are for believers only. Tonight we'll look at three of those things: God's Glory; Christ's Accomplishment and the Believer's Proof of belonging to Christ.

Proposition: Christ reserves certain blessings for believers only. Believers respond by following His new commandment to love one another.

When Judas had gone out, Jesus evidently felt free to talk with His disciples about certain things reserved for believers only: (vv.31-32) His Shining Glory, (v.33) His Solitary Accomplishment for them, and (vv.34-35) Their Visible Proof of belonging to Him.

(vv.31-32) His Shining Glory – In verses 31-32 He spoke to them about His Shining Glory: **John 13:31–32 - 31** *When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. 32 If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.* Jesus would not speak of His glory while Judas was in their midst because God will not share His glory with those who do not believe. The eleven faithful disciples would all share His glory so Jesus waited until He was alone with them to tell them the truth about His glory. What did He say to them? First He told them that His glory was now beginning to be made known to them: *“Now is the Son of Man glorified.”* Why “Now”? Because His hour had come. All during His ministry He had resisted those who attempted to make Him king before His hour came. On several occasions He resisted their attempts, saying, *“My hour has not yet come.”* However, He now knew that His hour had come – that it was time for Him to fulfill the mission God had sent Him to accomplish: redemption through the cross (cf. 12:23-28). By commanding Judas/Satan, *“What you are going to do, do quickly,”* (v.27) Jesus Himself put the plan in motion that would result in His death, burial and resurrection. In so doing, He signaled His voluntary acceptance of the costly work God the Father had sent Him to do that would result in His being glorified forever. We ask the question, “What does it mean to be glorified? What is meant by ‘Glory’?” Jimmie Evans says that, “Glory is what you're famous for,” and that is certainly true in this case! Jesus is justly famous for accepting the work of the cross for you and me. But Glory means more than that. It means “character revealed.” By going to the cross, Jesus revealed His heart for His disciples: **John 15:13 - 13** *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.* Furthermore, Jesus revealed to His disciples that He would not be alone in being glorified by His sacrifice: God the Father would also be glorified because of what He would do: *“And God is glorified in him.”* God the Father planned from eternity past for Jesus to redeem His elect. When Jesus carried out the Father's plan, He revealed the Father's character as well as His own. *“God is love,”* said the apostle John in one of his epistles. Can there be any doubt about that, given that the Father planned our redemption and Jesus accomplished the Father's plan through His sacrifice? Jesus emphasized this with an exclamation point in verse 32: **John 13:32 - 32** *If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.* Here He assured them that since He had brought glory to the Father, the Father would likewise glorify the Son, and He revealed to the disciples that is glory was not some far off glorification; it would happen within a few hours. What He was telling them was that the cross would reveal His glory and the Father's glory – the very thing that would reveal His heart and the heart of His Father beyond question.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] God's glory is best seen by Christ's work on the cross. God glorified both Himself and Jesus through the cross.

[REFLECTIONS ON THE GLORY OF THE CROSS] We have said that this matter is “for believers only,” and that might sound strange to some. Why did Jesus reserve this discussion for the eleven alone? First of

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all because unbelieving hearts can never see God’s glory in the cross. It takes eyes opened by the Spirit to appreciate the glory of God displayed through the cross. Secondly, this matter of glory is no small thing. In a sense, it is the whole purpose of creation. Why did God create? In order to make His glory known to men and angels. At the cross, God demonstrated His glory to believing hearts in brilliant fashion. Thirdly, is glory selfish? We all resent someone who’s always blowing his own horn, don’t we? Is that what God is doing here? Is God a monumental egoist? Not at all! God does not desire to demonstrate His glory for the sake of His ego. He desires to display His glory for your sake and mine. Like the angels, we are made to experience our greatest joy through admiring His glory. When He shows us His glory, it is not for His fulfillment, but for ours. He knows that believers will be most fulfilled when we see Him in all His glory and He earnestly desires us to have that satisfaction. Jesus saw the cross as His glory and His Father’s glory – the revelation of their character to believing men and angels – and that is enough to satisfy the believing heart.

(v.33) His Solitary Accomplishment – Jesus shared another truth for believers only: What He would accomplish for us on the cross, He had to do alone: **John 13:33 - 33** *Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going you cannot come.’* Jesus spoke to the eleven with affectionate tenderness, revealing to them that a separation between them was rapidly drawing near. On two previous occasions in the book of John, we find Jesus saying to unbelieving men, “Where I am going, you cannot come.” **John 7:32–34 - 32** *The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him. 33* *Jesus then said, “I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me. 34* *You will seek me and you will not find me. Where I am you cannot come.”* **John 8:21 - 21** *So he said to them again, “I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come.”* Why could they not come with Him? Because of their unbelieving hearts. Unbelievers cannot come into the presence of a holy God. But His disciples were *not* unbelievers! Why could they not come with Him? They had followed Him continuously for three and a half years. Where was He now going that they couldn’t come? The answer is that He was going to the cross and that He had to go alone. No one could go with Him. No one else could share in His suffering and sacrifice. **John 13:3 - 3** *Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, - knowing that everything now depended on Him, He said to His disciples, “Where I am going, you cannot come.”* In order to win our salvation, Jesus had to go alone to Calvary. But afterwards, after death, burial and resurrection, He would say to His disciples, “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). Jesus accomplished all of this, for believers only.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] We can contribute nothing to our salvation. Christ alone provided all we need.

[ILLUSTRATION] Love abhors separation from the beloved. We know this experientially from normal human life, do we not? Perhaps you’ve had a time in your life when you or someone you loved had to go away for a while – maybe for military service, or mission ministry, or just going away to school. Our hearts hurt when we have to be separated from those we love, but sometimes something so important that it can’t be ignored arises, causing us for a while to be separated from those we love. Jesus loved His disciples and His disciples loved Him. Together they endured the agony of Calvary – separated for a while from each other – so that they could have each other back forever. Jesus alone would bear the cross and heal the separation between God and man forever.

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[APPLICATION] If we abhor separation from those we love, how much more does God abhor the separation sin has caused between Him and His beloved children! Here is another truth for believers only. Only God could heal the separation sin caused between God and man. Unbelievers despise that truth. Unregenerate man always wants to believe that he can be his own savior. He wants to perform some holy service; or clean up his act and become righteous under his own self-righteous rags. He wants to “do good” to earn his way to heaven. To those whose hearts have not been awakened to spiritual reality through the work of the Holy Spirit, the message that Christ alone can save sounds like nonsense. But, to those who are being saved, the message of grace alone through Christ alone is the sweetest song known to man. Because He alone could do what was necessary for our salvation and did so at the cross, we can rejoice in never again having to be separated from God’s presence. We provide no help to Him. We cannot and do not contribute anything to our salvation. He alone has provided all we need by His sacrifice and from His own resources. Rejoice!

(vv.34-35) Their Visible Proof – Here Jesus gave His disciples a visible proof of their union with Him to show to the world: A New Commandment - **John 13:34–35 - 34** *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35* *By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*” What does He command us to do? Three times He said, “Love one another.” When Jesus said that He was giving them “a new commandment,” He did not mean that the commandment was new in a chronological sense. The commandment in fact was as old as Moses: **Leviticus 19:18** said, **18** *You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.* What Jesus meant by “a new commandment” was “fresh” – an invigorated commandment. In what way is this commandment new, then?¹ First of all, it has a new object. The old commandment found in Leviticus 19:18 simply commands God’s people to love other Jewish people. But Jesus’ commandment goes much farther! In Christ there is no Jew, or Greek, rich or poor, black or white. There are simply believers. Furthermore, the command does not stop with those who are Christians but applies to any who might one day become believers and since we cannot tell who that may be, we are commanded to love everyone around us in the hope that they may yet come to Christ. So the commandment has a new object. Secondly, the commandment has a new measure. Jesus desires this commandment to be practiced in a way unknown to the unbelieving world. The commandment is to be practiced “*Just as I have loved you.*” In other words, the commandment is to be practiced through self-sacrificial servanthood. We are to willingly lay down our lives for others, setting aside our own preferences, priorities and interests so that we may win others to the Master and help strengthen those who have already put their faith in Him. Finally, the commandment has new power. As those who have put faith in Jesus, believers have a new power within, the power of the Holy Spirit, with which to live out this commandment before a watching, skeptical world. Jesus commands His disciples to practice this new commandment for a specific reason: **35** *By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*” The proof of our union with Him is that we practice His love for others. The washing of one another’s feet through servanthood to all men will be a visible proof to the world that we really are His disciples. This proof is obviously possible for believers only to exhibit.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] When we obey His New Commandment we prove to a skeptical world that we are His disciples.

¹ James M. Boice has provided these three ways the commandment has been made new.

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[ILLUSTRATION] Tim Erickson has written: “As the second century of Christianity began to unfold, the faith had spread throughout the Roman Empire—particularly to some of its great cities, like Rome and Carthage in North Africa. At that time, Christians were the objects of great suspicion from their neighbors and government officials because they had given up the behaviors of their previously pagan lifestyle. Wild rumors had begun to circulate in some places about what Christians actually taught and did in their meetings together. To clear the air and defend the good name of Christianity, a church leader in Carthage named Tertullian wrote a brief explanation of Christian practices and a critique of the unjust accusations that had been made against them. In his work, he wrote at one point that these attacks against Christianity were made out of jealousy, because Christians displayed a character of life that their pagan neighbors did not possess.... Here is what Tertullian wrote: ‘It is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. See how they love one another, they say, for they themselves are animated by mutual hatred; how they are ready even to die for one another. (The Apology, ch. 39).’”² As the early followers of Jesus put into practice His New Commandment, they called attention to themselves among the pagan culture in which they lived. Some reacted with persecution; others with curiosity and admiration. But no matter which of these two reactions they provoked, one thing was clear: because of the love displayed by these followers of Christ, everyone recognized that these people were Christians.

[APPLICATION] Even today, perhaps especially today, people around us are hungry to see love. This is a basic human desire. As in Tertullian’s day, some may scoff; others mock; but some will be drawn to the Savior. Obeying Jesus’ New Commandment is the way we fly our flag as followers of Christ. In the first section of our study tonight we observed what Jesus has done for us: He has shown us His glory and the glory of His Father. In the next segment we observed another thing that Jesus did for us: He alone accomplished our salvation on the cross. In distinction to this our third movement shows us something we can do for Him: we can obey His New Commandment to love one another. Surely this is not too much to ask in return for one who has done so much for us.

Conclusion: Certain things are for believers only. To see God’s glory in the cross is a blessing for believers only. To receive the salvation won for us by Christ alone is for believers only. Now, there is one more thing for believers only: to love one another as Christ loved us. I trust you are enjoying all three of these gifts won for believers only by our Savior.

² Tim Erickson, Morningside Community Church, Montezuma, KS.