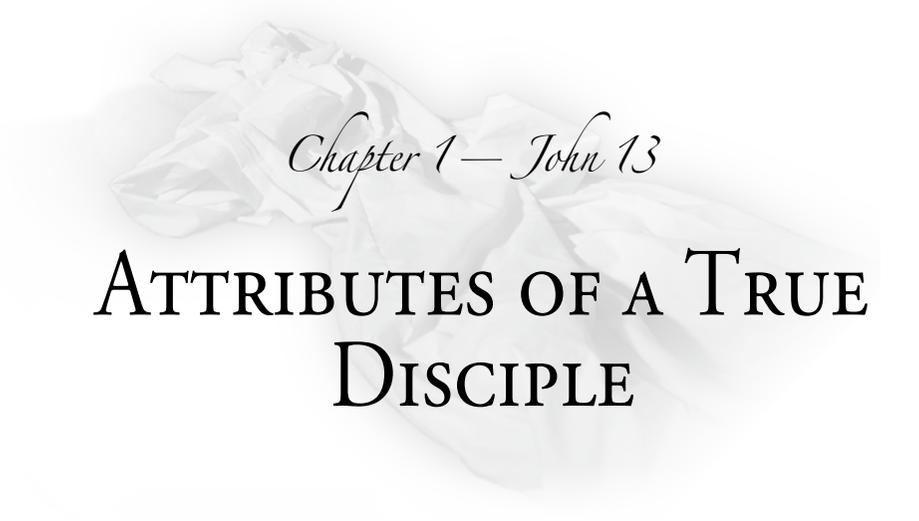


**GOD
FOR US**



Chapter 1 — John 13

ATTRIBUTES OF A TRUE DISCIPLE

It was a very cold day, to say the least. Rain was falling, and the temperature kept dropping until it was below fifteen degrees Fahrenheit. Add to that the Texas wind and the ice that was forming, and it was definitely a good day to be indoors by a fireplace with a good book! But we were not indoors. We were bivouacking with the Medical Cadet Corps (MCC) in a remote area near Lake Whitney, some twenty-five miles from the campus of what is now Southwestern Adventist University. Some of you may not know what the MCC was. During the days when the military draft was still in effect in our country, the Medical Cadet Corps was an integral part of Seventh-day Adventist education for academy- and college-aged males. It combined medical and first-aid instruction with military training, and it almost guaranteed that Adventist young men who had gone through the MCC would be assigned to be a medic if drafted into the United States Army. And that was a great place for a Sabbath keeper.

Captain Clyde Carlton “C. C.” Blackburn, a World War II veteran and the director of the Medical Cadet Corps at

Southwestern Adventist University, was very serious about MCC training. Those who served in the MCC under him later reported that they did very well when they put that knowledge into practice in the United States Army. In fact, some of them said that the MCC was tougher than army basic training!

Twice a year, we went on bivouac. This was a chance to put all that we had learned in our Tuesday night sessions into practice in an actual field situation. Bivouacking was like a test and how we handled it had a lot to do with our MCC grade.

With the weather like it was, we thought that surely “Captain” (as we affectionately called Captain Blackburn) would cancel the outing, but he had no intention of doing such a thing. I was the first sergeant of the corp, so Cadet Major Jim Hoehn (later to become president of the Kansas-Nebraska Conference) took me along with him to Captain’s headquarters tent and told him that the troops were cold and wet and that we were afraid we were going to have a lot of sick fellows on our hands if we stayed at the campsite. Captain explained to us that hardships were part of training and that this was a great opportunity to test our ability to cope with difficult situations. As the three of us talked it over, Captain shared some ideas and suggestions and then left it to us to solve the situation. By the way, that was great training!

Cadet Major Hoehn and I talked some more, and then Jim returned to the officers’ quarters. I went to the campsite where there were 180 cadets waiting, expecting to hear that we were breaking camp and going home.

It was my responsibility to tell them that we were staying and to hear their groans and see the disappointed looks on

their faces. I instructed them to take off their wet clothes and put on dry underwear—nothing but dry underwear! I told them that they would then be given a hot footbath while in their two-man pup tents, after which they were to get into their sleeping bags and not get out until the bugler sounded reveille the next morning.

One of the cadets who remembers that bivouac well is J. D. Quinn, head of the pastoral department at Three Angels Broadcasting Network and husband of Shelley Quinn, a well-known Bible teacher. Another is Max Trevino, president of the Southwestern Union Conference and a 3ABN board member.

With my assistant, Edwin Sharpe, who later became a pastor, I went to every tent, washing the cadets' feet as they stuck them out the flap of their tent. As I made sure those feet were very dry, I instructed each cadet that he was not to leave his ice-covered tent until morning and whatever he did, he was not to put his cold, wet clothes back on until morning. Extra underwear was the only clothing change each cadet had brought for the long weekend—Thursday through Sunday.

When morning came, 179 cadets of the 180 came forth from a good night's sleep. One cadet had either failed to hear my instructions—or failed to follow them—and had spent a miserable night shivering in his wet clothes. That day the weather got so bad that Captain received permission from the property owner for us to move into a deserted old brick mansion nearby. We slept there the next two nights and were dry at least but still cold!

Wherever I go, I run into men who were on that bivouac and remember that night vividly, even after so many years. They always mention the footbath! Now, I didn't wash

those men's feet because of some great humility on my part, although washing someone's feet was not new to me, because our church practices the ordinance of humility—footwashing—as part of the Communion service. Nor did I wash their feet because I was trying to teach them humility by example. I washed their feet because I knew that it would help keep them warm, along with the dry underwear, and I didn't need a bunch of sick cadets on my hands with all of the drills and projects that Captain had planned for us. But whatever my reasons, over and over through the years, former cadets who were on that trip have told me how much they appreciated me washing their feet and how much comfort it brought them. They've described how they burrowed down in their sleeping bags for a cozy night's sleep after that warm footbath.

Of course, Jesus didn't wash the disciples' feet to keep them warm. He did it to teach them—and us—that greatness comes only to those who understand the true humility of service to others.

What He did was remarkable indeed. In that time and society, washing someone's feet was the work of a slave. For example, although many rabbis had disciples who would render personal service to them, a disciple would never dream of performing a service such as this. Washing feet was far beneath anyone except a slave. If you went to the home of someone who had no slave, then you washed your own feet when they had become dirty by walking along dusty roads, wearing only sandals. Today, we live in an antiseptic world; we Americans bathe daily. In many parts of the world, people laugh at us for this—even in parts of Europe! There a weekly bath is more the norm than a daily one and washing one's feet and a sponge bath under the arms is

the daily practice. I've traveled in some parts of the world where I suspected that the custom was an *annual* bath or perhaps none at all!

As Jesus' disciples entered the room, they saw the pot with water, a basin for washing, and a towel for drying, but there was no servant present to take care of their needs. Perhaps they thought one was coming later; but one thing was certain: the thought of one of them performing the task for the others never entered their minds. Jesus had demonstrated the service of love throughout His ministry, yet they had missed most of what He taught and lived. There was a lot of contention between them: Who was the greatest? Who would be Jesus' second in command when He was ruling over Israel as they still expected Him to do?

At the table, John moved in on one side of Jesus and Judas on His other side. The disciples had been very upset when James and John had their mother ask Jesus to give them special positions of power when He came into His kingdom. Judas knew of the brothers' scheming; and even though he had already made arrangements to betray the Lord, he was keeping all of his options open. If he saw that Jesus had a great position for him, he could double-cross the Pharisees with whom he was dealing. There are even those who think that Judas was trying to force the hand of Christ and make Him show Himself as a military Messiah, who would restore Israel to prominence. One thing, however, is sure: Judas never once thought about washing anyone's feet. Neither did John or any of the other disciples, for that matter. They would wait for a servant to show up. But when one didn't, they were surprised to see the Lord get up, gird Himself with a towel, pour water from the pot to the basin, and begin

to wash the disciples' feet, starting, some believe, with Judas.

When Jesus came to Peter, the impetuous disciple refused to let the Lord kneel before him. This is the man who first proclaimed that Jesus was truly the Son of God, the man who first really grasped the divinity of Christ. To have the Creator wash his feet was something he just could not see himself allowing. " 'You shall never wash my feet,' " Peter said; but the Lord answered, " 'If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me' " (John 13:8).

In that case Peter answered, " 'Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!' " (verse 9). The Lord dismissed this as unnecessary.

The ordinance of humility is a beautiful service that we Adventists do as a prelude to the Communion service itself. At one time, a number of denominations practiced foot-washing, but only a few do so today. This service may seem a bit strange to someone who attends the quarterly Communion service for the first time. I remember taking a friend named Mack Hickman to church with me when I was about twelve years old. He was spending the weekend with our family while his parents were out of town. Not long ago, I heard from Mack, and he recalled going to church with me that Sabbath and having me wash his feet. He said it was the only time that anyone other than his mother had ever washed his feet. He said he had thought about it a number of times over the years, and later, as he studied the Bible for himself, he had seen the significance of the service.

Now, when Christ washed the disciples' feet, they were dirty! If there is ever a time that you want to make sure your feet are *not* dirty, it is when you go to an Adventist church

on Communion Sabbath, which is often the thirteenth Sabbath, and participate in the ordinance of humility! In all the years that I have been participating in the foot-washing service, I have washed only one man's feet that were dirty enough to change the color of the water in the basin! Those feet really needed washing! So, why do we wash people's already clean feet? It's very simple. Jesus said, " 'I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you' " (verse 15). He wants us to learn and practice the principle of humility. I've had people tell me, "I would never wash someone's feet; do you think that it's really necessary for salvation?" To whom I would reply, "It might not be necessary for everyone, but for you it may be vital!" Why? Because there is something within us that needs to die. It's called pride, selfishness, or self-centeredness, and a good way to start killing it is by washing someone's feet. And if I am not willing to do this, which our Lord did, it means that there is a need in my life for humility. Pastor Hal Steenson speaks of this condition as "the addiction of pride." It's an addiction that is difficult to detect and even more difficult to eradicate from our lives.

Humility is such a tricky thing—or perhaps I should say that pride is so deceitful that unless we're careful, we can be proud of our humility! Pastor Ben Leach, one of my great mentors in life, used to say, "I recently wrote a book titled *Humility and How I Obtained It*. But when I finished writing it, the book was so good that pride entered my heart, and I had to destroy the manuscript because I had lost my humility!"

Pastor Leach enjoyed telling this humorous story, but he also knew that he was sharing a great truth: *when you think about humility and focus on it, you will lose it for sure.*

What you will be left with is a false humility that attempts to appear humble but really isn't. Forget about yourself, focus on Jesus and on others, and humility will fall into place by itself. Humility isn't something you can learn or develop. It's a natural by-product of really knowing Jesus and patterning your life after His—a life of service. By the way, when you do this, you will be so relaxed and secure that some people will think you don't have humility. But remember, the Lord knows your heart, and it's what *He* thinks that's important. Christ wants us to have a genuine humility, not a phony "poor me" kind of humility that tries to camouflage a deeper pride—an obsession with self, which is what pride really is.

The ordinance of humility is a good opportunity for a "humility check." If I find myself skipping that part of the service too often, I might need to ask myself, "Why?"

When I was president of the Arkansas-Louisiana Conference, the conference took our pastors to Israel on a study trip that most of them tell me they will never forget. While there, we arranged to have a short service in the traditional upper room where Jesus ate the Last Supper with His disciples. It is most likely on the very site where the original was located. When our group arrived, there was only a little bit of water, one basin, and a small towel. There were fifty of us, and the only way to carry out the ordinance of humility was for a couple of us to do all the washing of the feet. So Max Trevino and I began washing the feet of each person. It was a very simple, but a very beautiful, service. Before long, other tour groups, not familiar with the footwashing service as Adventists are, came into the room. Some asked if we would wash their feet, and we did. They mingled their tears with ours, and we all had a great spiritual time together.

Jesus said, “ ‘If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet’ ” (verse 14). Servanthood, serving others, is essential for a disciple of Jesus, and it comes only through true humility. Jesus says that if you want true happiness and blessing, you can find them through serving others. “ ‘If you know these things, blessed [some translations say “happy”] are you if you do them’ ” (verse 17).

The second essential for a disciple of Jesus that we find in John 13 is *loyalty*. As Jesus washed Judas’s feet, it apparently was this disciple’s last chance to confess his sin and to give his heart to the Lord. But instead of being drawn to Jesus by this act of humility, he hardened his heart. He saw Jesus’ actions as weakness and concluded that Jesus could never be king of Israel and that betraying Him had been the right decision all along. He thought he might as well at least take the priests’ thirty pieces of silver and get something out of this lost cause. Obviously, Jesus would never be king! Selfishness always leads to disloyalty of one kind or another. Perhaps Judas felt that he had been slighted in some way or that he had not received enough credit for his contributions to the cause. Whatever the reason, bitterness started building in his heart, and soon he found himself estranged from the Lord.

This didn’t come as a surprise to Jesus. He said, “ ‘I tell you before it comes’ ” (verse 19), and then He described what was going to take place—that He would be betrayed by one in the group. That does not mean that Judas was predestined to do this and that he couldn’t change his mind. It simply means that Jesus knew Judas so well that He knew his weakness and that it would lead him to betray Him.

Jesus had intentionally placed Judas in the position of

treasurer to take care of the group's money. Why? Perhaps because He knew that Judas was good at making and managing money. However, it's true that we are often most tempted in the areas in which we have the most ability. If you are very good at something, watch out and be very careful, because the devil may find it easy to trip you up in this very area. To paraphrase H. M. S. Richards Sr., the great preacher and founder of the Voice of Prophecy, "If a man is a better mechanic, architect, singer, or whatever than I am, that is not a problem. I'm not the least bit jealous." Then he went on to admit, "But if a man . . . can preach a better sermon than I can and do better on the radio than I can and beat me at my own job, then it takes the grace of God for me to really love him and praise him from the bottom of my heart."¹ So in all likelihood, the sphere of your greatest ability will be the area where you are most vulnerable and where the devil will tempt you. Judas was not only good with money, he *loved* money.

In addition, Judas was not a loyal person. Loyalty is a trait that is developed as we place the needs and feelings of others above our own and as we truly care whether our actions will hurt another, rather than being interested only for our own benefit. If our hearts are tender and sensitive to the Spirit of God, He will convict us when we are disloyal to God, a loved one, or a friend. If we will listen to the Holy Spirit, He will lead us to have true loyalty—not only to those about us but to God and His truth too.

God can take our failures—for instance, disloyalty—and turn them into our strengths, if we will let Him. He can make us into loyal people who can be trusted by God,

1. H. M. S. Richards Sr., *Feed My Sheep* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1958), 73, 74.

friends, and family! He could have done this for Judas, but Judas would not let Him. In fact, Judas could have changed his mind right down to the very end, but he didn't. And that night his name became synonymous with disloyalty, with being a traitor. Loyalty is an essential quality for a disciple of Jesus Christ.

John 13 mentions a third essential quality of a disciple, and that quality is love! John wrote, "So, when he [Judas] had gone out, Jesus said, 'Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately' " (verses 31, 32). These verses set the stage for what Christ will say about love.

Jesus has such a close relationship with His Father that He completely reflects the Father's character and His will. The Father and the Son are One, and because They are One, if One is glorified, Both are glorified.

Christ saw the coming cross not as a defeat, but rather as a complete victory over sin. He had predicted all along His death that was to come, but also He predicted His resurrection from the dead. When He said, " 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up' " (John 2:19), He was, of course, speaking of His resurrection. He knew that after the Crucifixion He would rise again and ascend to the Father.

He obeyed the Father even unto the death of the cross, and obedience was the way that Jesus glorified the Father. Obedience through the indwelling of Christ through the Holy Spirit is the only way that our obedience brings glory to Him. When the devil is unable to get a person to deny God's existence, he does all he can to distort the person's discipleship—just as he did to Judas. Satan was successful in leading the Pharisees and the religious leaders of Christ's

day into legalism. Today, however, his most successful ploy is to lead believers into thinking that obedience is legalism.

Of course, obedience to gain God's favor *is* legalism and is of no value. However, obedience as a by-product of love is not only accepted by God, it is something that will always be present in a true faith relationship with Him.

There is only one way that people show that they love and trust a noble leader and that is by obeying that leader no matter what the consequences may be. A child shows love and honor to a parent by obeying that parent. And we show our love for God, not by rebelling against Him, not by taking His name in vain, and not by claiming to be His child and living like a child of the devil, but by lovingly obeying Him. Certainly, we should show more love and loyalty to God than we show to an earthly leader, but often that is not the case!

Let's say that you are an employee and you work for a wonderful boss (I have had some tremendous bosses in my life). This boss cares about you, provides the best benefits that are available, and looks out for your welfare as he does for all of his employees. Would you reward this boss by stealing from his organization, talking about him behind his back, failing to give him an honest day's work, and generally being disloyal to him and to his organization? Not if you are a decent person. Not if you have the love of God in your heart! Nor will you live in rebellion against God if you love Him. Obedience to Him will be easy, not difficult—and it will not be legalism!

When I was seven years old, my sister, Mary, was killed in an automobile accident at the age of eighteen. I will remember every detail of that horrible night as long as I live. As a result, I may have been overly protective of my chil-

dren, telling them whom they could ride with and what they could ride on and in. Motorcycles, for instance, were out! Our kids were not allowed to own a “murder cycle,” as I called them or to ride with anyone else on one. As an incentive, I promised each of my children ten dollars every time they turned down a ride on a motorcycle. They didn’t need to document the occasion; I took their word for it. Once, one of my kids came to me and said, “Dad, you owe me thirty dollars. I turned down three invitations to ride on a motorcycle.”

“Three people invited you to ride on a motorcycle?” I asked.

“No. I turned down this guy once, and then he asked me two more times, and I turned him down each time!” she replied.

At first, I started to protest that since all this happened on one occasion and the requests were all within a short space of time that I only owed her ten dollars. But I thought better of arguing about it and peeled off thirty dollars and gave them to her.

Often, the kids would tell me about turning down an offer to ride on a motorcycle that had happened some time in the past, but they wouldn’t accept payment for it. They said, “Dad, we didn’t want to go against your wishes and make you feel bad. And besides, we know that you are thinking about what is best for us.” Then I knew their responses were ones of love. Not long ago, one of my children confessed that he had accepted some motorcycle rides as a young person. All these years later, it made both of us feel bad. Obedience brings happiness; disobedience brings a lot of sorrow. My kids knew that I loved them so much that I would give my very life for them, and usually, they responded

with the obedience of love. Three of the four now have children of their own, and they know what that means—as do you, if you are a parent.

Without question, the key verse in this section of John 13 is verse 34, which speaks about a “new” commandment. But I think that it is significant that it is preceded by these words of Jesus: “ ‘Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, “Where I am going, you cannot come,” so now I say to you’ ” (verse 33).

Why did Jesus preface verse 34 with this statement? What is the significance?

I see two very important points here. First, Jesus, the only Example of true love the world has ever known, is about to leave this world. Jesus is Love personified, for He is God, and “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Without Jesus’ presence, how is the world to know what true love is? The answer is that the world was to see this love in His disciples. Jesus was leaving, but now His disciples were to love as He loved.

Second, I see importance in the way the disciples were to transfer the love they felt for their Master to a love for one another. There’s no question that the eleven disciples who were left after Judas’s departure, loved Jesus. But, for the most part, they had shown anything but love for each other. The vertical love the disciples had for Jesus must now be expressed horizontally in their love for each other and for all other Christians.

So Jesus tells them that He has a “new” commandment. Some people look at Jesus’ use of the term *new* commandment and get the idea that it replaces the “old” commandment, specifically the Ten Commandments. Nothing could

be further from the truth. *New* can mean “in addition to what has come before.” Or it can also mean a greater understanding of the previous commandment, an enhancement or magnification of it. For instance, Jesus said, “By no means will even a jot or a tittle of the law be changed” (see Matthew 5:18). He then amplified the law by showing that not only should we not kill but that even hatred is also a violation of this commandment. So if we truly love God and man, we will live in harmony with God’s ten love requirements.

You may recall that when Jesus was asked what was the great commandment, He first quoted Deuteronomy 6:5, “ ‘Love the LORD your God with all your heart.’ ” This embodies the first four of the Ten Commandments. Then He added, “ ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ ” (Leviticus 19:18), which covers the last six.

Now, in John 13, Jesus tells His disciples, “ ‘A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you’ ” (verse 34). This “new” commandment is not new in content, but it is new in scope. Leviticus 19:18 is speaking of your Jewish neighbor, your physical neighbor, or your family relationships. Jesus is speaking here in verse 34 of your spiritual family. This means that we are to love any believer in Jesus—regardless of race, national origin, economic status, educational level, and so on—as a brother or sister in Christ. And not only are we to love these brothers and sisters, Jesus says we are to love them, “As I have loved you.”

That’s a tall order. How does Jesus Christ love us? I think that the apostle Paul describes this kind of love very well in two places. First, in his “love chapter,” 1 Corinthians 13, and again in Ephesians 4:32. To the Ephesians, Paul wrote,

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”

So, first, we see that the love of Christ is kind. Christ demonstrated kindness to the woman taken in adultery. He even showed kindness to Judas, His betrayer. He created no scene when He confronted Judas. In fact, He was so calm that the other disciples thought He was sending Judas on an errand, which in a sense He was.

Paul’s love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, is the measure of love, the standard of love, that Jesus revealed so perfectly. And it begins with kindness. “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:4–7).

Now, because God is love and because Jesus is God, we can replace the word *love* with the name *Jesus*. Sometime, try reading 1 Corinthians 13 replacing the word *love* with *Jesus*. “Jesus suffers long and is kind; Jesus does not envy . . .” That’s a beautiful description of Jesus, isn’t it? But there is more. Jesus asks us to love as He loves. So, now put your name where the word *love* appears in 1 Corinthians 13 and read the chapter that way. For example, “Jim suffers long and is kind; Jim does not envy . . .” It’s quite humbling, isn’t it? I wish those words described me; don’t you wish they described you? If we read the Word of God as applying to ourselves and not to someone else, it will always bring us to our knees. I had read the Beatitudes many times and thought they were beautiful, poetic words. Then I preached a series of sermons on them, and as I carefully

studied each one, I was greatly convicted of my own spiritual need.

In Ephesians 4:32, the key word following “be kind” is *tenderhearted*. Of course, kindness is a result of a tender heart. When we love as Christ loved, we will be tenderhearted, sensitive to the needs of others. Christ loved His disciples selflessly, sacrificially, and understandingly. To do this, He had to be sensitive to their needs. He didn’t think of what He wanted but of what they needed. Often we think first of what we want to receive or what we want to see happen. But if we love as Jesus loved, we won’t put our happiness first; we’ll think, not of ourselves, but of others. This was the tenderness that Jesus demonstrated and that led Him to truly understand His disciples.

Finally, Ephesians 4:32 says we are to be “forgiving [to] one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” There is no greater example of forgiveness than God’s forgiving us. His Son, Jesus, understood that and immediately forgave those who crucified Him. He did not say, “I’ll forgive them someday.” He didn’t say, “I’ll forgive them if they ask Me to forgive them.” Jesus taught that if someone sins against you seven times in one day and asks you to forgive him, you should do it (see Luke 17:3, 4). This is the most important part of loving as Jesus loved—asking for forgiveness from those we have harmed and granting forgiveness to those who have harmed us, either physically or emotionally.

I have walked into churches where you could feel the tension and lack of love radiating from the members. Often people will go to a church like that, and even though people speak to them, they feel that the church is unfriendly and they leave with that impression. Friendliness is not demonstrated by glad-handing the visitors. Visitors are quick to

observe how the members treat each other. Nonverbal communication speaks louder than words. Visitors may not know one thing about differences between the members, particularly between church leaders, but they will still sense that something is wrong between the members of that church—something left over from the last board meeting, nominating committee, or some soured business deal between members.

On the other hand, when you fellowship with a church group that has harmony, you will see and feel the love between the members, and you will be drawn to them, because love for another one is catching. A number of years ago when I was pastoring the Arlington, Texas, congregation, we had a stewardship consultant, L. H. Coleman, conduct a church “capital stewardship” program. Part of this program was an all-church banquet held at a local hotel. One of the hotel’s waiters at this banquet, a Muslim from a Middle Eastern country, was blown away by the love and unity he felt the church members had for each other and by the friendliness they showed to him. He said he had served many banquets but had never seen anything like this group. He got acquainted with Howard Conley, one of the leaders in our congregation, and told him, “I want to belong to a group like this.” Of course, Howard was ready to share Jesus Christ with him, and he did.

We can’t observe God’s Ten Commandments without observing the most important commandment of all—the “new” commandment of love. If you don’t love God and love one another, you have missed the essence of God’s law. God is love, and God wants us to have His love in our hearts and demonstrate it to others! “ ‘By this all will know

that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another' ”
(John 13:35).