

Living on the Fourth Level

John 13:31-35

Introduction

During a recent vacation time away from the pulpit, one of my objectives was to attack my disorganized, bulging files and try to reverse the second law of thermodynamics, thus creating order from disorder. In the process of doing so, I discovered some wonderful things that had been hidden for fifteen years. A photograph of my ordination ceremony; an illustration or two that I knew I had, but could never find, etc. One thing, among the hundreds I came across, was a simple outline, stuffed away in some obsolete file folder that did not even relate, on the stages of growth that occur in the life of the disciple throughout the education process.

As I studied John, chapter 13, I remembered coming across that outline and, to my amazement, I was able to relocate it in the appropriate file! Everybody say, "I'm impressed!"

Four Stages of Spiritual Growth

What I want to do, before we pick up our exposition, is give you these four stages. Then, you can lose your outline in your own files! Seriously, even if you do, the Spirit of God can bring back to your memory, what, I believe, can be a lifelong challenge.

The challenge is, "What level am I living on?!"

The Infancy Stage

1. Stage, or level, number one is the infancy stage. The principal statement is, "Help me out!" The primary focus is, survival!

When my little Charity was nine months old, in the space of a week, she fell in the bathtub, she choked on a vanilla wafer, she burned her hand on the stove and the palm of her hand was red where the skin was growing back, and she fell down a couple of stairs when I was supposed to be watching her and forgot to put the little gate in front of our loft stairs. I turned around and she was already halfway up, so I shouted, "Charity!" That was the wrong thing to do, as it startled her and she sat back on top of nothing. I quickly went up toward her and she began to fall

toward me and bounced down two steps into my arms. All of that occurred in just a few days! The primary focus was survival!

So too, the young disciple is prone to the gravest dangers as he, like Pilgrim, in *Pilgrim's Progress*, encounters the Slough of Despond early on in his journey. He has to be pulled out to safety!

So survival is the primary focus and the principal statement is, "Help me out!"

The Childhood/Discovery Stage

2. The second stage is the childhood/discovery stage. The principal statement is, "Tell me what!" The primary focus is, learning.

Jesus Christ pulls the disciple into a series of classrooms where he learns – intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually – absorbing vast amounts of information.

This is like the child who is learning to speak. Imagine, every one of us, as little children, learned to speak the English language by listening, absorbing, and storing, not only the words your parents uttered, but even the accent! And some of you have strange ones! Where did you get it from? You say, "I don't know. If I did, I'd give it back!"

No, you would not. It is part of you and it is everyone else who talks a little strangely!

You picked it all up by listening. It was a time of discovery!

The Adolescent Stage

3. Stage number three is the adolescent stage. The principal statement is, "Show me how." The primary focus is, what is called, "the challenging focus."

By now, I want to do the things I see other, more mature people doing. I want to drive that car, teach that class, make that dress, build that project, so just, "Show me how."

The focus at this stage is, the challenging focus.

The Adulthood Stage

4. At the close of these three stages, the final stage, or stage number four, is the adulthood or maturity stage. One word characterizes this stage; one word characterizes the principal statement and the primary focus, and that is the word, “*reproduction*”.

The primary statement, spoken by the disciple, is no longer, “Help me,” or “Tell me,” or “Show me,” but “Follow me”. In other words, this person has reached the point where he, or she, is now telling someone else to follow them. He is now the one telling, helping, and showing.

We will get into this later, in John, chapter 15, but I will tell you now, that the mark of a mature disciple is not knowledge, it is reproduction.

The apostle Paul could make this astounding statement to that young, problem-riddled, immature church at Corinth. He said, in I Corinthians, chapter 4, verse 16b,

. . . be imitators of me.

In other words, “Do you want to know how to live? Watch me and reproduce my life in yours!”

Ladies and gentlemen, that experience was not just for the apostle Paul. According to God’s plan for the maturing of every one of us, there should come a point in our lives when we can turn around to a younger believer in Christ and say, “Watch how I live. Repeat after me.”

This is not a case for spiritual pride, but great humility, created by such an awesome responsibility! And, it is a responsibility too few are shouldering today.

What was the problem? It was the same problem that exists today. We are stuck at level one, two, or three. We are still just trying to survive with our testimony intact. We are still having to say, “Tell me again, why I should live this way, instead of that way. Show me how!”

In fact, the writer of Hebrews spanked the believers with his words, as he wrote, in chapter 5, verse 12,

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God . . .

A disciple who is maturing, is revealed by his ability to reproduce the discipler.

That is what makes John, chapter 13, verse 34, so powerful. Turn there.

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

There has been three and a half years of helping; three and a half years of telling; three and a half years of showing.

Now, Jesus says, “You are to advance to the fourth level.”

In other words, He says, “You are to reproduce what I have been helping, telling, and showing you. I want you, the disciple, to begin reproducing Me, the discipler, in and through your life.”

Now, granted, you and I will never completely close the door on any one stage of learning. We will never be without the need of someone helping, telling, and showing. The reason for that is simply because Christianity is not like attending college. There, you registered for the classes assigned to your major and took math, science, languages, etc. Once the semester was over, you shelved those books, probably forever, thankfully, and you moved on. You got that “A” or “B” grade and you were finished with ever having to write another research paper on microbiology. “Hallelujah!”

But, the Christian life is different. You never really master anything! It is a process of learning and doing, teaching and failing. However, the point remains that Christian growth can be measured, not by how many books you read, or classes you attend, or prayers you pray.

Now with that said, let us pick up our study where we left off, at John, chapter 13, verse 34, which happens to be one of those measurements.

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

Continue to verse 35.

By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

We previously discussed Judas leaving the upper room, where Jesus is reclining and eating with the twelve disciples. This will be their last meal together before Jesus goes to the cross.

In the early moments of their meal, according to verses 26 and 27 of chapter 13, Jesus has given Judas the sop as a sign that He knows Judas plans to betray

Him. Judas has just left and it is at this point, according to the other gospel accounts, that Jesus, among other things, will institute the communion ordinance. He could not do that earlier, because Judas was not a believer, and only believers are to partake.

Go to verses 30 through 32.

And so after receiving the morsel he went out immediately; and it was night. When therefore he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him; if God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and will glorify Him immediately.

The key word that begins Jesus' comments is the word "now," in verse 31,

. . . Now is the Son of Man glorified . . .

The word "now," or "nun" in the Greek, indicates that the process of glorification has commenced. That is, the possession of Judas by Satan and the departure of Judas now commences the final steps in the process of glorification.

Now, when Jesus speaks and, in His speaking, He repeats a word once or twice, you need to take note. In verses 31 and 32, Jesus repeated the same word five times; that is, "glorify or glorified".

Now, the words "glory, glorify, or glorified," that you see repeated in verses 31 and 32, come from the Greek word "doxazo". That is where we get our word "doxology". It means, "to praise or give glory". It refers to something wonderful, praiseworthy.

Doxology

And what does our Doxology say? Sing it with me.

Praise God, from whom all blessing flow;

Praise Him, all creatures here below;

Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Did you notice the predominate word in that doxology? Every line has the word, "Praise"!

This was not a morbid message from the Lord. He did not say, in verse 31, ". . . Now is the Son of Man glorified . . . oh Me."

Now there will be times of personal agony ahead for the Savior, but you need to remember, Jesus never refers to the cross as a disaster; as some colossal failure. *No!* He refers to it as a glory.

Now on to the next verse, verse 33.

Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You shall seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, I now say to you also, "Where I am going, you cannot come."

This is the only time Jesus ever called his disciples, "little children", or in the Greek, "teknion," in the gospel accounts. It is a close, affectionate term, most often used by the Greeks to describe the relationship between a mother and her infant. As the mother would say, "My little sweet baby," Jesus was saying, "My dear little children, I'm going to go away, and you can't come with Me."

Now why the affectionate, fatherly term? Because He is telling them one of the most frightening things to a young child – the thought of being alone.

Now, my twin sons, at eight years old, shared a bedroom upstairs. Their six year old sister slept downstairs in her own room. She thought they were lucky! That would change! The point is, for her, as a small girl, her brothers were lucky because, when the lights were turned off, they had each other in the same room, while she was alone. And so, every night, after family prayer, my little girl would ask the same questions, "Mom, what are you going to be doing? Where will you be? Dad, what room are you going to be in?"

She did not want to be all alone, down that long hallway. Now, imagine if I told her, "Sweetheart, Daddy and Mommy are going to leave the house tonight. We can't tell you exactly when we'll be back, but you stay alone in your bedroom."

Not a chance! She would be utterly terrified.

In a very real sense, the disciples, at this moment, experienced child-like fear, "You're going away? You're leaving us? We can't come?!"

"That's right, little children, I'm going away, and you'll be alone for a little while."

Now I happen to believe that the disciples did not hear another word Jesus said. In fact, as soon as He stops his comments, look at what Peter asked, in verses 36 and 37.

Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?" Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You."

Interpreted, this means, "Lord, don't leave us all alone."

Now, in the next chapter, you Bible scholars already are aware, that Jesus will assure them that the Holy Spirit will come later as a comforter, a helper. But ladies and gentlemen, what you need to remember is that He did not give them the Holy Spirit so they would never need each other!

But look how Jesus answers to their fears at this moment. Look again at the first part of verse 34.

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

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Do you know what I believe He is saying? “You’re not alone, you have each other.”

He says to us, “You’re not alone, you’ve got a brother in the room with you, a sister. You have a family that is supposed to love you like I’ve loved you!”

Jesus goes on to say, “And the world will take note of this family!” Look at verse 35.

By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

In Christ’s day, the world could tell who was a disciple of the Greek philosophers by their knowledge and intellect. The world could tell who was a disciple of Alexander, and Hitler by their passion for world domination.

Jesus says, the world will know you are My disciples by this one badge, this insignia, this emblem – love!

Now, let us take another look at verse 34a.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another . . .

Wait, a second! This is not new. We have already learned, from the Old Testament books of Deuteronomy and Leviticus, that we are to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

What Is New

About This New Commandment?!

So, what is so new about this new commandment? Let me provide at least three things.

We have a new concept of love

1. First, we have a new concept of love.

The word, selected by the Lord, for “love” is the word, “agapao,” or “agape,” as we normally refer to

it. It is a word that refers to a volitional choice to sacrifice, to commit, to give.

This was a word that, to the Greek writers, lacked feeling, passion, and excitement. The Greeks preferred the words, “eros,” referring to sensual, physical love; “philia,” referring to deep friendship, “storge,” referring to strong loyalty and love between family members; “epithymia,” referring to passionate longing love.

It is interesting that the word “agape” is almost completely lacking in pre-biblical Greek. To them, this word was boring. Yet, the biblical writers chose this word, almost exclusively, in their references to the Christian community. You see, with agape love, you do not fall in love, you choose to love.

In Ephesians, chapter 5, we have the same word concerning the relationship between husbands and wives. You do not fall in love with your wife, or husband, you choose to love your wife, or husband. You choose to give, you choose to commit, you choose to sacrifice, you choose to serve.

This is a new concept!

We have a new example of love

2. The second thing that is new about this new commandment is that we have a new example of love.

Look back at verse 34a again.

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

.

Jesus is saying, “Move to the fourth level. I showed you how to love; I taught you about love, now reproduce that love in and through your own life.”

“And start with the eleven fellows in this room!”

We forget that this command was given to these eleven men. We tend to make it much larger than it originally was. When Jesus said, in verse 34, “. . . love one another . . .,” we tend to think of the whole body of Christ. They looked around the room at ten other men.

Jesus was saying, “Now Peter, I know that you and John are totally different in personality, but love each other. Andrew, I know how daring you are and how you rarely stop to ask how, but here is Thomas, who needs the facts and assurances – you two need to love each other. Simon the Zealot, I know how much

you've hated Roman rule, as well as any Jew who would betray his Jewish heritage, but there is Matthew over there. Matthew was a tax collector, which meant that he had bought the right to tax the Jews from the Roman government and then padded his pockets by over-taxation. Simon, you choose to love him."

That is like putting Bill Clinton in the same room with Rush Limbaugh and saying, "Okay, fellows, love one another."

It is a practical, serving love. It is love dressed in overalls and working boots.

The famous *Peanuts* cartoon had Schroeder, that piano-loving intellectual, sitting at his miniature grand piano. He is playing, and Lucy, who has forever been crazy about him, comes and interrupts him. "Schroeder," she coos, "do you know what love is?"

Schroeder abruptly stops, stands to his feet, and says precisely, "Love, noun, a strong affection for or an attachment or devotion to a person or persons."

Then he sits down and resumes playing. Lucy sits there stunned and hurt, and then murmurs, "You know, on paper, he's terrific."

Schroeder, like many disciples, are stuck on level three – they know love by definition; they have been shown love and taught love, but there is no application.

Jesus makes very clear that the application of agape love is the reproduction of His love for them. And that reproduction is a sign of maturity.

Think of all the adjectives for Christ's love. It was:

- constant,
- caring,
- demanding,
- challenging, and
- forgiving.

He knew what Peter would do, yet He loved him!

In the book, *Will Daylight Come*, by Dr. Richard Carl Hoefler, a little boy was visiting his grandparents. He was given his first sling-shot and he had great fun playing with it in the woods. He would take aim and let the stone fly, but he never hit a thing. Then, on his way home for dinner, he cut through the back yard and saw his grandmother's pet duck. He took aim and let the stone fly. It went straight to the mark and the duck fell dead.

The boy panicked. In frightened desperation, he took the dead duck and hid it in the woodpile. Then, he saw his sister, Sally, standing over by the corner of the house. She had seen the whole thing.

They went into dinner. Sally said nothing. After dinner, Grandmother said "Okay, Sally, let's clear the table and wash the dishes."

Sally said, "Oh, Grandmother, Johnny said he wanted to help you in the kitchen today. Didn't you, Johnny?"

And then she whispered to him, "Remember the duck."

So, Johnny did the dishes. Later in the day, Grandfather called the children to go fishing. Grandmother said, "I'm sorry, but Sally can't go. She has to stay here and help me clean the house and get supper."

Sally smiled and said, "That's all been taken care of. Johnny said he wanted to help today, didn't you, Johnny?"

And then she whispered, "Remember the duck."

Now this went on for several days. Johnny did all the chores, his and those assigned to Sally. Finally, he could stand it no longer, so he went to his grandmother and confessed all.

His grandmother took him in her arms and said, "I know, Johnny. I was standing at the kitchen window and I saw the whole thing. And because I love you, I was already willing to forgive you. I would never again have mentioned the duck."

We have, within us, the sinful nature that naturally refuses to forgive. Had Peter denied ever knowing us, we would struggle to forgive him. And the words we, most likely, would whisper in his ear, every time we got the chance, would be, "Peter, remember the courtyard; remember the rooster . . ."

We struggle with Christ's "agape" love.

I like the transparency of Abe Lemmons. He was the Longhorn's basketball coach, until he was fired by the Texas Athletic Director. Abe was asked, by a reporter, if he had any bitterness. He said, "Bitterness? Not at all. But I plan to buy a glass-bottomed car, so I can watch the look on his face when I run over him."

It is interesting that Jesus did not say, "Try to love each other; give it your best shot."

No. He said, "Love each other, like I've loved you!"

We have a new example.

We have a new impact because of love

3. The third thing that is new about this new commandment is that we have a new impact because of love.

How could you tell an Old Testament Jew from his culture? By what he ate, how he dressed, the rite of circumcision, how he sacrificed, etc.

How can you tell a New Testament disciple? By how he loves.

It would become an unconquerable love that would sweep the world by its undeniable power.

So, in John's gospel, chapter 13, verse 34, Jesus gently, yet forcefully, says, "Don't hate one another. Don't be ungracious, unkind, quarrelsome, and discourteous to each other. You are all you have."

And, when you love one another in a self-sacrificing, transparent, serving, practical way, the world will take note, and so will the church!

Timeless Truths

Let me conclude our discussion by giving two summary statements. These statements were true in the first century and they are true into this century.

For the world, Jesus has given them the opportunity . . .

1. Truth number one is, for the world, Jesus has given them the opportunity to test our authenticity.

It is as if Jesus has turned to the world and said, "I'm going to give you the right to prove the authenticity of anyone who says they belong to Me. You decide for yourselves, based on what you see!"

Can unbelievers tell that you are a Christian by the way you treat your wife or husband? Can they tell you are a Christian by the way you talk about other people?

Minucius Felix, a Roman lawyer living in the second century, wrote of Christians, "They love each other, even without being acquainted with each other."

The scoffer, Julian, the Apostate, wrote, "Their teacher has implanted the belief in them that they are all related."

The supreme evidence of discipleship, the authentic badge is love.

John Maxwell has put it this way, "People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care."

Turn to I Corinthians, chapter 13, verses 1 through 3, and read what Paul said.

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

Oswald Sanders has written, "We can preach, we can pray, we can give, we can serve, but if we can't love, we have accomplished nothing."

For the believer, Jesus has given us the responsibility . . .

2. Truth number two is, for the believer, Jesus has given us the responsibility of measuring our growth.

For the first century Christian, the tests were more obvious – it was often a matter of life and death. Rarely do we see that kind of opportunity come along. Yet, when it does, a persecuting world stands in awe.

After the *U.S.S. Pueblo* was captured by the North Koreans, the eighty two surviving crew members were thrown into a brutal captivity. In one particular instance, thirteen of the men were required to sit in a rigid manner around a table for hours. After several hours, the door was violently flung open and a North Korean guard brutally beat the man in the first chair with the butt of his rifle. The next day, as each man sat at his assigned place, again the door was thrown open and the man in the first chair was brutally beaten. On the third day, it happened again to the same man. Knowing the man could not survive, another young sailor took his place. When the door was flung open the guard automatically beat the new victim senseless. For weeks, each day, a new man stepped forward to sit in that horrible chair, knowing

full well what would happen. At last the guards gave up in exasperation. They were unable to beat that kind of love.

For us, the tests are simpler, yet just as difficult. It may be allowing your child, or parent, to serve the Lord full time on a distant field; volunteering to serve in a ministry that does not excite you, yet you know there is simply a need; forgiving someone who has cost you financially or emotionally.

Or, serving love may be simpler – like letting someone out of the parking lot in front of you, as you leave church; like volunteering for nursery duty, for working with children in the children’s ministry, or ushering.

Ladies and gentlemen, fellow disciples of Christ, Jesus Christ did not extend an invitation to us to serve and sacrifice as expressions of love, in John, chapter 13, verse 34 – He gave a command. He did not say, “Here is a series of steps to happier living, if you’d like to try them,” He gave a command.

He simply said, to them and to us, “Make level four a part of your life – reproduce My love for each other, and don’t ever forget, the world is watching.”