

Yeshua's last few days as a living human being were marked with a number of monumental events. In those last days, He drove the money-changers out of the Temple precincts, predicted the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and was greeted by hundreds . . . maybe thousands of followers who remembered His many miracles . . . especially a rather recent one when He resurrected Lazarus from the dead. It appears that many of the Jewish people had come to see that He was indeed the Messiah, even to the point of laying down a carpet of palm branches as He rode into the holy city. One might consider that if Yeshua had continued doing what He had been doing, the number of followers might continue to crescendo until He would have been able to wrest the control of the land from the Romans and actually restore the kingdom in His day. But that was not the plan, and much to the dismay of His followers, Yeshua sat down with His disciples one night and talked with them about His upcoming death and departure from this world. Yeshua's words that night are recorded to some degree or another in all four gospel records, but the majority of what He said is recorded in the book of John.

There's not enough time in one sitting to elaborate on everything Yeshua said and did that evening, yet there are two things that tend to stand out from the others. The first is His use of bread and wine as a way to remember His sacrifice, and the other is His admonition, or better yet, His commandment to "love one another". While both give rise to questions about their meaning and implications, the second – to "love one another" – is probably more acceptable to those who question His messiahship, yet more likely misunderstood by those who profess to believe in Him today.

What did Yeshua actually say that evening, and what implications do His words have for us today? In order to make a determination, we'll try to answer the following questions:

- Did Yeshua actually add a "new" commandment to the Torah, and if so, does it violate a previous Torah commandment?
- What prompted this "new commandment"?
- How did Yeshua reinforce that "new commandment"?
- Does it apply to us?

Let's begin by reading the text.

^{NKJ} **John 13:33-35** ³³ "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. ³⁴ "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Of the four gospel narratives, this commandment only appears in the gospel of John, but in His narrative, it appears four times in the space of three chapters¹ and all at the same setting. We'll read the other instances in a few moments. For now, let's begin to answer the questions.

A Torah Violation?

If Yeshua added a new commandment, would He have then violated the Torah and thus disqualified himself from being the Messiah? He certainly would have. The Torah is very explicit -

¹ John 13:34,35; John 15:12,17

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 4:2** "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.

The Torah clearly prohibits adding to or taking away from the Torah. Though judgments could be made as to how to interpret God's commandments, and halacha² could be established as a guide by which the community should walk in them, you could not just come up with some new commandment and make it mandatory on the people.

Some (including myself) have said that it's not really a new commandment, but just a different way of saying something He had already said – for instance when He answered one of the Sadducees who had asked Him to state the greatest commandment in the Torah. His answer was -

^{NKJ} **Matthew 22:37-39** "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." ³⁸ "This is *the* first and great commandment. ³⁹ "And *the* second *is* like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

This second commandment is quoted from Leviticus 19:18 where it says –

^{NKJ} **Leviticus 19:18** 'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I *am* the LORD.

This commandment is certainly not a "new" commandment, but actually quite old – in fact over 1400 years old by the time Yeshua said it. Could it be that Yeshua was referring to it when He made the statement that night? Probably not. After all, if Yeshua had wanted to reiterate what had previously been written, why not just repeat the old. So (contrary to what I had previously thought) maybe it is a 'new' commandment after all. Let's look deeper.

In the John 13 passage the Greek word for "new" is "kainos" (Strong's 2537). The Strong's definition is "new, recently made, fresh, recent, unused, unworn, of a new kind, unprecedented, novel, uncommon, unheard of". In all 44 passages the word is used in the KJV, it is translated 'new'. When translated into Hebrew through the LXX, it always translates to the word "chadash" (חָדָשׁ – Strong's 2319), a word that means "new". Granted, the root of "chadash" can also mean "renewed"³, but does it seem logical that Yeshua would have needed to 'renew' the commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself"? Again – probably not.

Thus, it appears that Yeshua actually did make a new commandment, but was it a commandment along the same line as those found in the Torah, i.e. – applicable to all Israel? Let's look and see.

The Greek word in John 13:34 for "commandment" is "entole" (Strong's 1785). It's used 71 times in the New Testament and in all but two it translates into the word "commandment". But "commandments" are not always those given by YHVH. One of those places where "entole" is found in the LXX is -

^{NKJ} **Jeremiah 35:14** "The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, which He commanded His sons, not to drink wine, are performed; for to this day they drink none, and obey their father's commandment. But although I have spoken to you, rising early and speaking, you did not obey Me.

Jonadab gave a commandment to his sons, just as we do to our children. We'll tell them to take out the garbage and we expect it to be done. A commandment to our children is indeed a

² literally "the walk" – because many Torah edicts are somewhat vague, YHVH allows judgments to be made in regards to how they will be interpreted and observed within the community of Israel. A good example of halacha is when a fellowship or community determines which items are considered to be leavening agents and thus prohibit their use at community meals during the Passover season.

³ 1 Samuel 11:14

“commandment”, but it’s not a Torah commandment. Instead, it’s a commandment a man gives to those under His authority. Here’s an example from John’s account of the gospel.

^{KJV} **John 11:57** Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that, if any man knew where He were, he should shew *it*, that they might take Him.

In their desire to put Yeshua to death, the priests and the Pharisees ganged together and commanded the people to reveal the whereabouts of Yeshua. Being that most of the people in Judea did submit to the authority of the priests and Pharisee, it’s likely that this was a legitimate commandment and not a violation of Torah, though their intent was certainly a violation of it.

Thus we see that even though “entole” means commandment, it doesn’t necessarily mean that the commandment is on the same plane as the Torah. But there’s more to consider . . . Yeshua’s commandment was only given to His disciples, not to all His followers, and certainly not to all Israel. Let’s look at the context again –

^{NKJ} **John 13:33-35** ³³ "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. ³⁴ "A new commandment . . ."

The context of John 13:34 is very clear . . . Yeshua was speaking only to His disciples. He was not speaking to the masses in an open-air event out on a mountainside. This was in a small room in Jerusalem. Even though some of the things He said could extend to all believers, Yeshua’s twelve (now eleven) disciples were the ‘little children’ in that room, and apparently it was because He was no longer going to be with them that He gave His new commandment. It seems He knew that because He was not going to be with them on a day to day basis, there was a need for them to focus on loving each other.

So – for the sake of a possible Torah violation, Yeshua’s new commandment applied only to His disciples – those under His authority. It was given for a specific purpose, a purpose that did not apply to Israel as a whole. Thus, in that regards, Yeshua did not violate the Torah by making a ‘new’ commandment.

Why a New Commandment?

In John’s account, Yeshua’s new commandment appears after He had shown himself to be a servant by washing the disciple’s feet and after Judas Iscariot was identified as His betrayer and had left the room. Neither of these events seems to be such that they would initiate Yeshua’s commandment. On the other hand, Luke’s account provides a very good reason.

Luke begins with Yeshua breaking bread and sharing wine with His disciples, after which He briefly discusses the situation with Judas before detailing the disciples “dispute” as to who would be considered the greatest disciple.

^{NKJ} **Luke 22:24** Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest . . .

What prompted this dispute? Was it because they, as well as many of Yeshua’s other followers, believed the coronation of Yeshua as king was just around the corner? If so, it was important that they remind Him of their individual accomplishments and the things He had said to and about them. Apparently they had forgotten how just months earlier James and John – the “sons of thunder” had asked for the #2 and #3 spots in the Kingdom, but had been strongly reprimanded by Yeshua for making such requests. Of course Peter – after walking on water – probably thought he would have a lofty position in the kingdom as well.

But Yeshua was not amused. While his disciples were jockeying for position, He probably had recollections of how King David's family fell apart as his sons and grandsons continually struggled with each other over position in the ancient Kingdom of Israel. It was not going to be that way when He became king. Rivalry was not going to be a part of His kingdom. Instead, He was going to rule like His father David – who knowing that it was his destiny to become King over all Israel, refused to take that honor before it's time out of his love for Jonathan. Such would have to be the case of those who would rule under Him, thus He said to his arguing disciples -

^{NKJ} **Luke 22:25-26** . . . "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' ²⁶ "But not so *among* you; on the contrary, He who is greatest among you, let Him be as the younger, and He who governs as He who serves.

The disciples had to learn to love each other, to put away their own ambition and desire for prestige and power. Paul expressed this thought in his letter to the Philippians –

^{NKJ} **Philippians 2:3-7** *Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.* ⁴ Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. ⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and coming in the likeness of men.*

Could it be that Yeshua understood His disciple's shortcomings in this area and thus later chose Paul – a man who exhibited these qualities - to be an associate of the disciples?

Besides their jockeying for position in the kingdom, Yeshua had another – and probably more important reason for admonishing them to love one another. Yeshua had been preparing them for a mission that would eventually “turn the world upside down”. They were to be witnesses to Judea, all Israel, and ultimately the entire world that the long-expected Messiah had come and had paved the way for the reconciliation of Israel and the restoration of the Kingdom of God on earth. As witnesses it was important that they all spoke the same.

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 19:15** " One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that He commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.

For their witnesses to agree, they must each resist the temptation to lift himself above His fellow disciple . . . they must remember that their mission is to raise up disciples to Yeshua, and not to themselves.

^{NKJ} **Matthew 23:8** "But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren.

This is better understood in the context of the rabbi / talmid⁴ system of the 1st century where a student would choose the rabbi under which He wished to study and would eventually become a rabbi himself. A rabbi could become notorious if He had a unique message or a particular way of presenting the message. Yeshua became notorious because His message was unique but also because it was followed by signs. Such was to be the case of the disciples – their message was different from the mainstream, and it was to be followed by miracles. Therefore, they would have to be careful to not be lifted up in pride and seek notoriety for themselves.

⁴ Hebrew word for “student”

They would also have to resist the temptation to change or embellish the story in order to make themselves appear more lofty or important than the other disciples. Being that they were often sent in different directions, it would be tempting to do so, thinking that their audience would never come in contact with another of the disciples.

Yeshua only had one chance at this, and these twelve were the ones God had given Him, so it was important that they get it right – thus He commanded them “love one another”.

Yeshua Reinforces His New Commandment

For the disciples, Yeshua’s new commandment was more than just loving their fellow disciples; they were to love them like Yeshua loved them. What’s more, by exhibiting that type of love, they would be recognized as disciples of a different type of rabbi -

^{NKJ} **John 13:34-35** "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Yeshua’s love for them was exhibited by the fact that even though He was their master and teacher, He didn’t put himself above them. He included them in practically everything. He traveled with them, ate with them, healed the sick with the . . . even shared special insight into His parables and His thoughts.

For 3 ½ years He had shown them examples of what they should and should not be. For instance they were to avoid the “perks” of their calling -

^{NKJ} **Luke 20:46** "Beware of (behold) the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts,

Instead of being exalted, they should show themselves to be humble -

^{NKJ} **Matthew 23:11-12** "But He who is greatest among you shall be your servant. ¹² "And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and He who humbles himself will be exalted.

These were the attributes Yeshua needed His disciples to exhibit. If they didn’t, the message could fail and the plan would fail.

Twice more that evening Yeshua reiterated His new commandment followed by examples of how He had loved them.

^{NKJ} **John 15:12-15** "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for His friends. ¹⁴ "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. ¹⁵ "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what His master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.

Yeshua’s example of love was that He was going to give up His life for His friends. He then qualified what it meant to be His friend by stating the His friends are those who do as He had commanded. Apparently Yeshua’s disciples did follow His instructions because He immediately called them His friends.

Part of being a friend is sharing what you are doing with them. Yeshua shared His thoughts, His desires, and His insight into God’s way of thinking with them. The disciples understood what it meant to be a friend of Yeshu – the man they believed had been sent by God to bring the covenant to fruition. After all, the covenant started with Abraham – a friend of God -

^{ESV} **Isaiah 41:8** But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend.

You'll recall that when the Angel of YHVH was preparing to destroy Sodom, He said to Abraham –

^{ESV} **Genesis 18:17-19** The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, ¹⁸ seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? ¹⁹ For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has promised him."

For the disciples, having Yeshua as their friend meant that He would share with them His insight into their mission. Like YHVH did for Abraham, Yeshua would help them to see what He was doing behind the scenes and what they could expect as they traveled down the road.

Yeshua closed this portion of His discourse by reminding them that they had not volunteered for this mission, but that He had personally chose them for it. This in itself would be an encouragement, especially as they grew older and wiser in the scriptures and could see that Yeshua's death, and ultimately their mission was always part of God's plan. With that thought in mind, He repeated once more –

^{ESV} **John 15:17** These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

Application to the Believers

After Yeshua's death we see that the disciples followed His commandment. They stuck together with a common message and a common goal. They became the witnesses of His life, His death, and His resurrection. At Pentecost, they all came together with one mind – one message – all speaking the same thing.

^{NKJ} **Acts 2:1** When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

Later, when there was a question about the role of circumcision and the non-Jewish believer, the disciples came together with a unified voice. Later Paul conferred with the disciples, making sure His message was on track; in line with theirs. Their oneness prevailed throughout their lives, providing us with a uniform witness of Yeshua's time on earth. Because all their acts and all their letters agreed, their witness therefore agreed and was therefore considered "true". Once a person heard their testimony, believed their words, and compared it with the words of the prophets, they too could become His disciples. Thus their mandate to raise up disciples to Yeshua was successful and the "way" flourished.

^{ESV} **Matthew 28:19-20** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

According to tradition, the last living witness of Yeshua's life was John, the disciple Yeshua loved. It's believed that he wrote his last three letters while exiled to the Isle of Patmos. In the first of these letters, He talked about the fact that He and His fellow disciples were witnesses of Yeshua's life. It's obvious in what he wrote that he and his fellow disciples all presented the same message. Notice how many times he said "we" in this passage -

^{ESV} **1 John 1:1** That which was from the beginning, which **we** have heard, which **we** have seen with our eyes, which **we** looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life- ² the life was made manifest, and **we** have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us- ³ that which

we have seen and heard **we** proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

John never hinted that there were differing versions of the message or that one of the disciples may have gotten off track and taught a different message. Instead, it was the message that “we” taught based on what “we” saw and heard.

Much of what was written in this epistle was also said on the night of Yeshua’s last supper, but instead of being directed at the original twelve, John’s letter was directed to a new generation of believers, a new generation of disciples – ones who had come to believe in Yeshua by the testimony John and his fellow eye witnesses. We are those disciples. Even though we are not eye-witnesses, we are never-the-less, His disciples; and as disciples we have the same mandate as that given to Peter, James, John, and all the other disciples who were sitting around the table listening to Yeshua on that fateful night. We are to set aside our desire for prestige, power, and authority, and unite under a common message . . . a common goal. We must follow the mandate given by Yeshua to raise up disciples to Him . . . not to us, but to Him. Thus Yeshua’s words in John 13, the ones John repeated while in exile, are as relevant to us today as they were to them.

^{ESV} **1 John 3:23** And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as He has commanded us.

Shalom Alecheim