

A New Command For A New Year

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[0 : 00] And turn in your Bibles. Tonight our scripture reading is in John chapter 13.! After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me.

His disciples stared at one another at a loss to know which of them he meant. One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, Ask him which one he means.

Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, Lord, who is it? Jesus answered, It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.

Then dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.

What you are about to do, do quickly, Jesus told him. But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the feast, or to give something to the poor.

[1 : 38] As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out, and it was night. When he had gone, Jesus said, Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.

If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. My children, I will be with you only a little longer.

You will look for me. And just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now. Where I am going, you cannot come. A new command I give you.

Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

Let's hear the word preached. Well, tonight we are looking at a new command for a new year.

[2 : 44] And sort of as I look out at 2020, what do I want 2020 to be? More than anything, I want it to be a year of growing, expressive, affectionate, Jesus-like love.

Here at Grace Fellowship Church. A growing, expressive, affectionate, Jesus-like love here at Grace Fellowship Church.

A new command I give you. Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. You know the setting? It's a very familiar setting.

It was their last night together. It was this period, this last day, this last night, before this great transition that was going to happen. Jesus was going to die.

He was going to be buried. He was going to be raised. Forty days later, he would ascend into the heavens. So this is the last time that Jesus and his disciples were going to be together like this.

[3 : 51] This was a time of transition. And so as Jesus looked forward into what was coming, he wanted to set a tone for what he wanted his disciples to do.

So you know the setting. It was their last night together. They were in the upper room. And John says, it is night. It's night. So it's dark. And Judas has just left.

And now it is just the 11 disciples. The ones that are going to become the foundation for the church. These very important men.

And it seems with Judas gone, Jesus can now bear his heart in maybe a way that he never could have before. So Judas is gone.

He can strengthen these disciples' hearts for what is about to come. He can set the tone for what the day is to follow. And so it's in this very intimate setting that he says, love as I have loved you.

[4 : 52] Love as I have loved you. And that's what I want to ponder together with you tonight to think about. A new command for a new year.

Jesus himself calls it a new command. Obviously, the command to love is not a new command. And that's as old as Moses, to love your neighbor as yourself. But so what was the new part?

Why is Jesus saying this is a new command? Well, it's not the love part that is new. It's this as I have loved you. That's the new part.

The command to love God, of course, is as old as Moses. But what but with the incarnation, with the birth of Jesus, with the coming of Emmanuel, with the life and the ministry of Jesus, how he had lived with them.

And he had loved them person to person for three, three and a half years, how he had taught them. That was new. That was new.

[5 : 54] That was something that had never happened before. God had come in the flesh. God come down. God came down. And that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched.

So the word had become flesh and he had lived among them. He had tabernacled. He had tented. He had lived with them and he had loved them. So, brothers and sisters, Jesus loved his disciples.

Not in an abstract or in a theoretical or a theological way. He loved them. He loved them directly and they knew it.

And now his love was going to be the example, was going to be the pattern for the way that we should love one another.

That's the new part. Love as I have loved you. And so, how had he loved them? Tonight's sermon kind of has, we're going to go back and forth between two ideas of how he loved them and how he loves us.

[7 : 08] And I want you to drink deep of that part. And then the second part we're going to continually go over is then, well, then how should we love each other? How should we love each other in 2020?

We want to circle around that again and again and keep looking at it. And I hope and my prayer is that the Holy Spirit will take this word and drive it into our hearts and give us this determination that in 2020, yes, we have loved each other.

But let's love each other more and more like Jesus loved. So, how had he loved them? One, he loved them really. He loved them really.

And what I mean by that is he loved them genuinely. Without any, there's nothing fake about Jesus' love. There was nothing hypocritical about Jesus' love. There was nothing put on or pretend about Jesus' love.

You don't spend three and a half years with a guy walking around, moving around with no permanent home, in the fields, in the cities, in these small towns, in houses, walking day after day, hot and tired.

[8 : 17] We meet Jesus sort of in the run of the mill in John 4 where he's hot and he's tired. That wasn't an atypical day. That was their life.

And so, they're living this life together. And they're facing criticism. And they're facing attack. And they're crowded together. And they're getting jostled. And they're getting accused. And you don't follow someone for three and a half years in a life like that unless you know he loves me.

He loves me. So, living with Jesus wasn't luxury. So, why did they do it? They did it because they knew he loved them.

He cared for them. He wasn't using them. It wasn't just word. There was deed. There was real heart behind it. Now, the Bible talks about drawing close to God with your mouth but being far away from your heart.

So, it's loving and worshiping God but it's just at the mouth. It's just things you say but your heart's far away from that. It talks about loving just in word but not in deed.

[9 : 29] Just with word with no heart. No reality. And Jesus wasn't like that with his disciples. And he isn't like that with us. It was real.

And that's how he loves us. In the Old Testament, God, the Lord, frequently complains that his people aren't giving them their hearts.

He's given himself to them. He loves them with his heart. But he says, Israel, I love you but you don't love me. You have my heart but I don't have your heart.

Give me your heart. Give me your love is what he's saying. And so, now Jesus is saying, love one another as I have loved you. Love each other with your heart.

Really. Affectionately. And so, what do I want 2020 to be for Grace Fellowship Church? It's here. It's heart level. Heart love.

[10 : 31] Real love for each other. Real affection for each other. Real self-giving. Real others taking into your heart.

We saw that this morning where our Lord has our concerns. He carries us. That's how he loves us. And what I'm saying is, as brothers and sisters, that's what I want to see growing still more and more here.

Where we love each other genuinely. So, Jesus' heart is open wide. I've engraved you on the palms of my hands. And Jesus says, love each other that way.

Love each other that way. These are your people, brothers and sisters. These are your friends. There's none like them on the earth.

And I don't mean that in general. There is a general love that we have for all Christians. And we should have for all Christians. But for you, how I want you to think about this is, the people here at Grace Fellowship Church.

[11 : 40] These are your people. And we're going to sing at the end of our time here, blessed be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love. Our hearts.

Not every Christian everywhere. That's true in a certain sense. But our hearts. So, love as I have loved you. Well, how did he love them? He loved them really.

That's first. Second, he loved them intimately. He loved them incarnationally. He loved them up close. There was not any distance. There was no shouting his love from a mile away.

No. We've already talked about this. They had seen him. They had touched him. They had lived with him. They had handled him. He had been with them in the fields and in the rooms and in the crowds and out alone and out on the sea.

They had been with him. They had eaten together. They had walked together. No, we don't know what Jesus, everything Jesus did for his three-year ministry. We only get samples of it.

[12 : 48] There's a lot of things that we don't see that he did. There were days and weeks spent with each other. Doing life together.

Jesus and his disciples living together. That's how their discipleship had begun. Matthew, come follow me.

And what did Matthew do? Well, he was at his tax collector's booth and he got up and he literally followed Jesus. Jesus. That's how their life began.

It's literally getting up and you're walking behind Jesus. You're walking with Jesus. So Jesus living with you and you living with him. And that's why when it came time to pick a replacement for Judas, there were basically two major criteria that they had to fulfill.

The disciples said, therefore, it's necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us. So they had to be witnesses of the resurrection.

[13 : 55] And they had to be one of these people that had been with Jesus for a significant amount of time of his earthly ministry. One of the intimate ones that Jesus had been among them.

And he had been, that word is, in the middle of them. He wasn't a peripheral figure in their life. He was with them.

A shepherd with his sheep and his sheep all around him. Or a mother with her children and her children all around her. That's how he had loved them.

That's how he had loved them. He had been with them. They did life together. Not at arm's length, but in person. Their lives intertwined.

They shared his heart and they shared his life. And that's not just for them. It's not any different for us. Yes, he is physically gone.

[14 : 58] But he still dwells with us by the spirit. He's still our good shepherd living among the sheep. I want you to just turn in your mind to the book of Revelation. And you remember the first three chapters.

Chapter 1, Jesus appears in a revelation. And chapters 2 and 3, he's writing letters. He's talking to the different congregations.

And when Jesus appears, he appears with these candlesticks all around him. And Jesus is walking among the candlesticks, his churches. He's not separated from them.

He's with them where they are. In Revelation 1 through 3, you will never hear Jesus saying, I have heard this about you.

As if Jesus was getting some report from someone else. It's never that. It's always, I know this about you. I know your afflictions.

[16 : 00] I know your deeds. I know the slander that those people are saying about you. Now, how does he know that? Because he's there with them. When they do their deeds, he is there seeing it.

He's there with them as they do their deeds. I know your afflictions because I'm with you in them. I see them with my very own eyes. I know how they are slandering you. Because I'm with you and I hear it with my own ears.

Paul was taken before the emperor for Caesar. And he says, everyone abandoned me.

And I think in the judgment of charity, we can say that that moment was too much for all of Paul's friends. But Paul says, the Lord stood by me.

The Lord stood by me. It wasn't too much for Jesus. Sometimes we get into those situations where people don't even know what to do or say.

[17 : 07] They don't know how to help us. It's all too much for them. But nothing is ever too much for Jesus. And Jesus is saying, that's how I have loved you. I've loved you up close.

I loved you in real life, in person. Now love each other that way. Love each other in that up close, personal way.

And so, in 2020, would you be willing to commit in your own hearts and your mind to loving like that? Jesus says, that's something we must do.

To be with each other. Our culture is becoming more and more separated. For a number of reasons.

Technology is pushing us towards greater isolation. It's just easier sometimes to just be by ourselves. And so, we're starting to lose something of the reality of living with people.

[18 : 11] But we are embodied creatures. We're not just eyes and ears and thumbs. We are meant to be with each other.

To physically be present with each other. To be near. To have eye contact. Not just over some conference thing.

Eye contact. To touch. To shake hands. To hug. To sit next to each other. To laugh with each other.

To pray with each other. To work with each other. That means hospitality. As a genuine way of putting this into practice.

Hospitality is not putting on a dinner show for your guests. It's opening your heart and your life and your home. So that you bring people in. Into your life. Into where you are.

[19 : 15] And so they can be with you where you are. And you can be with them where they are. But that's just one way that we can be with each other in 2020.

I love how a lot of the ladies are going on shopping trips and just going out to eat. Things like that are how you foster loving relationships.

It's not all deadly serious. Sometimes it needs to be fun. Sometimes it needs to just be present with each other. And doing life together in all of its different shades and colors.

And so it's doing small groups. Sitting there with the same people. Month after month. And getting to know each other.

And getting to talk to each other. And getting comfortable with each other. And learning to share each other's burdens. And learning to share each other's joys. And just learning to share ordinary life with each other. It's praying together.

[20 : 12] It's coming to Wednesday night. And sitting shoulder to shoulder with your brother. We're all crowded in there. And we sit next to each other. And we pray.

And I bring my brother before the throne of God. And then we go together before the throne of God. We sing there is a spot where spirits blend.

Where friend holds fellowship with friend. Around the common mercy seat. Loving each other like Jesus loved us.

Means that we will be entering more into that. Of going with each other. Being with each other. And instead of letting that technology isolate you.

Can you commit to using it. To connect with other people. In real deep meaningful ways. And so. I was planning to bring my phone up here.

[21 : 11] But it would probably ring. But. Can you take out your phone. And say in 2020. I want to use my phone to the glory of God. And I want to use the smart phone. To love my brother.

To love my sister. I'm not going to use it purely for myself. I'm going to use it to love. And to connect. And to serve. To enjoy. To live with my brothers and sisters.

Loving like Jesus loved. Loving means loving incarnationally. Intimately. Connected. In life. With each other. What else? Three.

He welcomed all kinds of people. Into a circle of love. He welcomed all kinds of people. Into a circle of love. Into his love. And people who were different.

Learned to live with each other. And love each other. As they learned to love him. As they experienced his love for them. They learned to love each other. So Matthew.

[22 : 11] We've already talked about him. He's a former tax collector. And you've read the Gospels. No one is as bad and as big of a traitor as a tax collector.

Matthew was one of them. Working for Rome. Making money. It was his business to make money off of his Jewish brothers.

So he worked with Rome. Collecting taxes. There's another disciple. In Jesus' little band. Of eleven. Or of twelve.

Simon the Zealot. We don't know anything about him. Except his name was Simon. And he always has that. Title the Zealot. Most people.

Most scholars. Most commentators. Think that he was part of the Zealot party. Which was centered up in Galilee. So in the earliest years of the first century. And this is a little story of political intrigue.

[23 : 08] And death. And rebellion. In about 6 AD. There was a revolt up in Galilee. Where some Galileans revolted against the Roman taxation.

And it was the start of this Zealot party. And it continued all the way down. Until 70 AD. When they were destroyed. Along with Jerusalem.

But. The Zealots. As a party. I'm not saying Simon himself did this. But this was the kind of person. That Simon was.

This was his political standing. This is how he thought. The Zealots would. They were so zealous. In their revolt.

That they would burn down. Their fellow Jews. Who would pay taxes. Who would register. To pay taxes. And eventually. The Romans killed the leader. They crucified two of his sons.

[24 : 05] But that revolt. And that agitation. Continued. And it was centered mostly up in Galilee. And that's where most of Jesus' disciples came from. And so it's not very much of a big surprise.

That here's Simon. He's a man. Who's living in Galilee. And this is his political persuasion. Maybe that's what he used to be.

I don't know. But. That's about 180 degrees. It's about a thousand miles away from where Matthew was.

Wasn't it? So you had Matthew. A tax collector. And Simon the Zealot. And they are at the same table. And they are loving each other. Because they both know that Jesus loves them.

That's far wider. Than Republicans and Democrats. That's more like Benedict Arnold and George Washington. Sitting down and learning to love each other.

[25 : 04] And what I'm saying is. Jesus loved them as he did. They learned to love each other. And Jesus loved people with differences. Differences.

Differences. Different ways of thinking. Different attitudes. Different ways of doing life. Different political and economic viewpoints.

Now if we only love those who completely agree with us. On every jot and tittle. Of political, economic. Way of doing life.

Privately, publicly. If we only love those who completely agree with us. Then how are we any different. Than anyone else. How are we any different.

Than the world. If we can only stand to live with someone. Who thinks and acts. And has the same attitudes. And the same opinions.

[26 : 02] And the same way of doing life. As I do. How is that any different. Than the world. And I really want to say. How is that even love.

You're just loving them. Because they're just like you. It seems more like you just love yourself. Tertullian. He's an early church father. He said. It was the Christians love for each other.

That impressed the pagan world of his day. The pagan world. Saw this Christian. Phenomenon happening. And what. Made it so remarkable.

Is how they actually loved each other. That's what Jesus said would happen. But this is what he said. See they say. See these pagans. This is what the pagans say. See how they love one another.

For they themselves. Are animated by mutual hatred. See how they are ready. Even to die. For one another. So the world.

[27 : 00] They're animated by mutual hatred. Just read the comment section. On any political story. On any website. Mutual hatred.

Is at the heart. Of so much. Now is that love. Is that love. Is that how Jesus loved.

Is love so hard hearted. And so strident. And so particular. And so demanding. That there's no room. For any kind of differences. There's no slack.

At all. Jesus love. Put his arms. Around people. That were very different. From each other. And if you think about.

How amazing it is. Very different from who. And how he was. And yet. Because they loved him. They learned to love each other. And what I'm saying is.

[27 : 57] Is we can be very different. We can have different opinions. About a lot of different things. We can have a lot of different ways. Different ways of looking at life. And doing life.

And attitudes about all sorts of things. But that should not. And they cannot. Stop love. And it shouldn't stop love. So that's number three.

How did Jesus love them forth? He loved them affectionately. He loved them affectionately. Jesus was not. A cold person. He wept.

For Mary and Martha. He wept. He visibly. Was upset. When he came to Lazarus tomb. Charlie read it for us.

When Judas left. He felt. Or when. This was all about ready to happen. It says that he was distressed.

[28 : 59] He's distressed. And troubled. When he thought about Judas betraying him. This was not like. Oh this was bound to happen.

And so yep. Let's just do this. When he thought about how he loved Judas. And about what Judas was about to do to him. It troubled his heart. And yes.

What it was going to lead to. That troubled his heart. But part of it was what Judas was doing to him. Because it wasn't just a betrayal of. Of Jesus.

It was a personal betrayal of Jesus. That is not a clinical. A clinical. Unfeeling person.

He freely gave. And he freely received. Warm. Love. He freely gave it. And he freely received it. John felt like he could lean against him.

[29 : 58] Jesus was not unapproachable. John felt like he could say. I was the disciple Jesus loved. I know that. Two times right in John 13, 14, 15, 16. This section. He says. He right out. Comes out and says it in the passage. I love you. He says that word to them. In person. Right in the front of their.

To their faces. Have you done that to a brother or sister lately? Where he said. I love you. So that they could hear it. Not text it. Not type it.

Those are great. That's good. Jesus did it right. And in person. In Charles Spurgeon's morning and evenings. For December 20th.

[30 : 52] He started with Jeremiah 31, 3. This was the text at the top of the page. Yay. I have loved you with everlasting love. That's the text. And Spurgeon says this.

Sometimes the Lord Jesus tells his church his love thoughts. He has these thoughts. And he tells them his love thoughts. He does not think it enough behind her back to tell it.

But in her very presence. He says. Thou art all fair. My love. He will have no secret of his love. It's.

It's not. Jesus never thought or felt like. Oh. They know. I love them. I don't need to say it.

He said it. He said it. He didn't make a secret of his love. Now some of us are more naturally affectionate. And outgoing with our love. Just by nature. By temperament.

[31 : 48] And that's good. But we. If that's not you. We can't stop where nature planted us. So yes.

God made us in such and such a way. And so it's going to be easier or more difficult. But we cannot stop where nature planted us. There is grace to grow in this. And more.

I think. Becoming like Christ. Is becoming more like him. In this affectionate. Approachable.

Love. In this warm affectionate love. So John 13. One. Having loved his own who were in the world. He now showed them. He showed them. The full extent.

Of his love. And it was going to begin with a feet washing. And it was going to begin with all of his teaching. And it was going to end with a cross. But he. He is going to show them. His.

[32 : 42] Love. He showed them. So love. As I have loved you. So can we start. Saying it more. Can we do that.

For our brothers and sisters. In a genuine. Non-ironical. Non-humorous. Serious way. To say. I love you to them. Jesus.

Jesus wasn't afraid. To bear his heart. And let them know. How he felt. And his attitude. Toward them. And so let me start.

I do love you. I really. Love you. You're my people. You're my friends. You're the people. I belong to. I cannot imagine.

Doing life. Without you. I love you. So how can we love. Like he loved us. We can say it. And then we can show it.

[33 : 43] He showed them. Warm affectionate words. And then. Humble. Lowly. Service. That's how he loved us. And that's how.

He loved them. And that's how we should love one another. How did he love his disciples? Fifth. Sacrificially. In a few hours. He's going to go in front of.

He's going to walk in front of. Them. With a violent mob. Coming up towards them. They're all armed with clubs. And whatever else they had.

And. With violence. And he's going to. Say. If you're looking for me. Then let them go.
Would you have the. Courage. And the love. To stand in front of a mob. And say. If you're looking for me. Then take me. Let them go. That's how we love them.

[34 : 45] And then he went through the trials. And the whippings. And all the rest. And. On a particular. Human level. His disciples were kept safe. They were kept safe from that.

You know. Peter got. A taste. Of the pressure. And he buckled. It was too much. For his disciples. They were not ready for that.

And so. So Jesus says. This is. It's all going to come on me. Let them go. John 15. My command is this. This is the second time.

He says it. Later on. John 15. My command is this. Love each other. As I have loved you. Greater love. Has no one. Than this. That he lay down. His life.

For his friends. Maybe. Tertullian. Was not being. Wasn't exaggerating. When he says. Those Christians.

[35 : 43] They laid down. Their lives. For each other. Jesus said. That's how I love. And I just want you. To notice again. That Jesus is telling them. That. He's not hiding.

His love from them. He's telling them. He wants them to know. You know what. Men. I love you. And guess what. There is no. Greater love. Than the kind of love. I have for you. People have said.

That they loved. And they've used. Huge big words. And flowing speech. But I want you. Men to know. That. How I. Feel. My attitude. The way. I love you.

Is the greatest. Kind of love. And I'm ready to display it. And I'm ready to show it to you. That's how he loved us. He laid down his life. For his friends.

So he loved us. Sacrificially. Sacrificially. And at the heart. Of sacrifice. Means pain. And death.

[36 : 37] It's costly. Love. Any kind of sacrifice. Involves. Pain. Loss. And Jesus is saying. That's how I love you.

I will accept pain. And I will accept loss. And I will. I will accept. I will accept. The agony. Of. Of what it's going to take.

To rescue you. And so what did he take? He took hell. That we might live. No. He faced. Outer.

Darkness. Jude talks about. Outer. Darkness. Deepest. Darkness. Reserved. Jesus. Received that.

He received. The father's. Anger. He endured. Justice. Without. Any. Mercy. Have you. Ever. Tasted. Justice.

[37 : 34] Without. Any. Mercy. Jesus. Took that. And justice came. Because you know.

It wasn't just a mob. That was coming up that hill. It was the judge. Of all the earth. Ready to render judgment. Was coming up that hill.

And he's coming. Striding across. The land. And he has a sword. And Jesus. Stepped in front of me. And he stepped in front of you. And he stepped in front of his children.

And his friends. And he said. It's me you're looking for. It's me. Let them go. And so his love for us.

Cost him. Depths. Of pain. And misery. And blackest darkness. That no.

[38 : 31] Human has ever. Fathomed. And his love took him there. And now. Out of that. Sacrifice.

It's as if he's. On the cross. Still. He's saying. Love. Love each other. The way I love you. Sometimes we say. It's too hard.

To love this person. This person's too difficult. It's too hard. To forgive this person. It's too hard.

To overlook this sin. It's. It's too hard. To keep going. And to serve this person. It's costing too much. It's too. Painful. And there are times.

When living together. Living with sinners. That's where you are. That's the truth. It's hard. But have any of us. Went as far.

[39 : 26] As Jesus Christ did. In love. Have. Are we going anywhere. He hasn't. Gone. Anywhere in sacrifice.

That he hasn't gone. No. We can go deeper. Can't we? We can accept more pain. And costly. Love.

We can bring that. We can. We can take that. So. We can put more. On to the altar. Of sacrifice. Of love. We can put more. Of our time. And we can put more. Of our money.

And we can put more. Of our attention. And we can take. More of our prayers. And instead of just. Giving it to ourselves. We can give it to other people. And we can. We can be there. With people. So sometimes.

Loving. As just being present. So. Time. Yes. Money. Yes. Patience. Yes. Aggravation.

[40 : 20] Of annoyance. Hard work. Yes. Yes. We can put it all. On the altar. And really. The question is. How can we do anything. Less than that. Jesus gave everything.

For us. He says. I love you. I love you. And the words. The song of Solomon. With burning love. That no amount of water.

All the rivers. All the rivers. Could not. Put out. That's how I love you. It's real love. It's intimate love. It's.

It's inclusive love. It includes all of us. It's warm. And affectionate. And it's sacrificial. How do we love like that?

Well. The key is very simple. We need to gaze upon that love. That he has for us. And we need to take it in. We need to sit around that fire.

[41 : 17] And we need to be warmed. In our hearts. In our souls. To such a degree. That we are now warmed up. And then we need to then. Take that warmth. And that love.

And give it to our brother. Give it to our sister. Warm them. With your love. As you sit. By the fire. Of his love.

So what. Am I hoping for. For 2020. At Grace Fellowship Church. I hope you receive more. Into your spirit. Into your soul. By faith. Of Christ's love for you.

And then I want you to. Go out. And share that love. With your brothers and sisters. Well. Let's pray. Lord.

We do. Love you. We love you. For who you are. We love you. For the way you are. We love you. For all of your attributes. We gaze upon.

[42 : 15] Your glory. And we. Gladly. Believe. And welcome. Your grace. Lord Jesus. There's. Been.

No one like you. Help.!

more sacrificially, more graciously give that love to our brothers and sisters. There are all kinds of attacks from the outside and from the inside, from my own heart, from from the devil himself upon this church, seeking to tear apart the union of love that we have here.

And so, Lord Jesus, I pray that you would protect us from the evil one. And that you would make us strong in love for each other. That we would be patient and kind and gentle and gracious and compassionate with one another.

That we would learn to be steadfast in our love and affection and our faithfulness to each other as we have been loved the same way. Pray this in Jesus' mighty name. Amen.