

J. C. RYLE'S NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN
13:31-38

31. Therefore, when he had gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. 32. If God is glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall immediately glorify him. 33. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me; and as I said to the Jews, Where I am going, ye cannot come, so now I say to you. 34. A new commandment I give to you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. 35. By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love for one another. 36. Simon Peter said to him, Lord, where are you going? Jesus answered him, Where I am going, you cannot follow me now, but you shall follow me afterward. 37. Peter said to him, Lord, why cannot I follow you now? I will lay down my life for your sake. 38. Jesus answered him, Will you lay down your life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say to you, the cock shall not crow till you have denied me thrice.

31.--[*Therefore...gone out, Jesus said.*] The withdrawal of Judas from the company of the disciples, at that point, forms a distinct break in the narrative. At once, from this time, our Lord seems to speak as one relieved by the absence of an uncongenial mind. There is a manifest alteration in the tone of all He says. It seems pitched in a higher key.

Bengel, at this point, interposes an entire interval of a night and thinks that a new discourse begins here. It seems a needless view and is very unnatural.

[*Now is the Son of Man glorified, etc.*] This is a deep saying, and not least so because both the verbs are in the past tense. Literally rendered in each case, the verb should be "has been glorified." This is not an uncommon mode of speech. The glorification is so near, so certain, so complete that it is spoken of as a thing accomplished and even past. It was accomplished in purpose and in a few hours would be accomplished in reality. (So John 17:4.) The meaning of our Lord may probably be paraphrased thus: "Now has the time come that I, the Son of Man, should be glorified by actually dying as man's substitute and shedding my blood for the sins of the world. Now has the time come that God the Father should receive the highest glory by my sacrifice on the cross."

Let it be noted that the Lord regards His own atoning death on the cross as the most glorious part of His work on earth; and that nothing so tends to glorify the Father's attributes of justice, holiness, mercy, and faithfulness to His promises as the death of the Son.

Let it be noted that the Lord does not speak of His death as a punishment, disgrace, or humiliation, but as an event most glorious--glorifying both to Himself and to the Father. So Christians should learn to "glory in the cross."

If we do not take this view and adhere to a strictly literal rendering of the verb glorified, as past, as Hengstenberg does, we must suppose it to mean, "Now at last, by my perfect righteousness in life and willingness to suffer in death, I, the Son of man, have received glory, and my Father at the same time has received glory through Me." But the other interpretation, taking the past tense for the present or future, is better. "The sacrifice has begun. The last act of my redeeming work--specially glorifying myself and my Father--has actually commenced or is commencing."

Augustine and Ecolampadius hold that the expression, "Now is the Son of Man glorified," has a special reference to the glory that surrounds our Lord when the wicked are all put away from Him and He is attended only by saints. This peculiar glory was on Him when Judas Iscariot went out and left Him and His faithful disciples alone.

32.--[*If God be glorified in him, etc.*] This verse may be paraphrased as follows: "If God the Father be specially glorified in all His attributes by my death, He shall proceed at once to place special glory on Me for my personal work, and shall do it without delay by raising Me from the dead and placing Me at His right hand." It is like the famous passage in Philippians: "Wherefore God also has highly exalted Him." It is the same idea that we have in the 17th chapter more fully: "I have glorified Thee on the earth; now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self." (Phil. 2:9, John 17:5.)

If the Son, on the one hand, specially glorifies the Father's attributes of holiness, justice, and mercy by satisfying all His demands with His own precious blood on the cross, so, on the other hand, the Father specially glorifies the Son by exalting Him above all kings, raising Him from the dead, and giving Him a name above every name.

"In Himself" must refer to that special and peculiar glory which, in the counsels of the blessed Trinity, is conferred on the Second Person on account of His incarnation, cross, and passion.

It is hardly needful to remind Christians that "if" does not imply any doubtfulness, but is rather equivalent to "since," as in Col. 3:1: "If ye then be risen with Christ."

If anyone wishes to adhere rigidly to the past tense in the first "glorified" of this verse, it undoubtedly makes excellent meaning. "If God the Father has been glorified on the earth by my life and perfect obedience to His law, He will also glorify Me in my own person by raising Me from the dead and placing Me at His own right hand, and that very soon." But I doubt this being the full meaning for the reasons given in the preceding verse.

The perfect harmony and cooperation of the Persons in the blessed Trinity shine out here. The Son glorifies the Father, and the Father glorifies the Son. The Son shows the world by His death how holy and just is the Father, and how He hates sin. The Father shows the world, by raising and exalting the Son to glory, how He delights in the redemption for sinners which the Son has accomplished.

Chrysostom thinks that "immediately glorify Him" must refer to the special signs and wonders which appeared from the very time that our Lord was on the cross. "So the sun was darkened, the rocks rent, the veil of the temple parted, many bodies of the saints arose, the tomb had its seal, the guards sat by, and while a stone lay on the grave the body rose."

Musculus remarks that here you have the great principle asserted which is always true: "Those who glorify God shall be glorified by God."

33.--[*Little children.*] This is the only time our Lord ever calls His disciples by this name. It was evidently a term of affection and compassion, like the language of a father speaking to children whom he is about to leave alone as orphans in the world. "My believing followers, whom I love and regard as my children."

Observe that the expression is not used till Judas has gone away. Unbelievers are not to be addressed as Christ's children.

[*Yet a little while I am with you.*] This seems to mean: "I am only staying a very little longer with you. The time is short. The hour approaches when we must part. Give me your best attention while I talk to you for the last time before I go."

[*Ye shall seek Me.*] It is not quite clear what this means. Of course it cannot refer to the time after the resurrection, when the disciples were fully convinced that "the Lord had risen." Much less can it refer to the time after the ascension. I can only suppose it means: "After my death ye shall be perplexed, amazed, and confounded for a little season, wanting Me, seeking Me, wishing for Me, and wondering where I am gone. The very moment the little child is left alone by mother or nurse, it begins to cry after her and want her. So will it be with you."

[*And as I said to the Jews, etc.*] This sentence can only mean: "The words that I said to the Jews will soon apply to you also, though in a very different sense. Where I am going you cannot follow Me. You will follow Me hereafter, but at present there is a gulf between us, and you will not see Me."

Of course, the words applied to the Jews meant that Jesus was going to a place where spiritually and morally the Jews were unfit to go, and in their impenitent state could not go. The words applied to the disciples only meant that Jesus was going into a world where they could not follow Him till they died. They were remaining on earth and He was going to heaven.

Hengstenberg observes that this is the only place in which Jesus ever spoke to His disciples concerning "the Jews." Elsewhere He uses the expression in speaking to the Samaritan woman (John 4:22) and before Caiaphas and Pilate.

34.--[*A new commandment, etc.*] The immense importance of Christian love or charity cannot possibly be shown more strikingly than by the way it is urged on the disciples in this place. Here is our Lord leaving the world, speaking for the last time, and giving His last charge to His disciples.

The very first subject He takes up and presses on them is the great duty of loving one another; and that with no common love, but after the same patient, tender, unwearied manner that He has loved them. Love must needs be a very rare and important grace to be so spoken of! The lack of it must needs be a plain proof that a man is no true disciple of Christ. How vast the extent of Christian love ought to be! The measure and standard of it is the love wherewith Christ loved us. His was a love even to death.

Melancthon points out our Lord's great desire to promote unity and concord among professing Christians by His dwelling so much on love before He left the world.

Why did our Lord call love a "new" commandment? This is a rather difficult question and has called forth great variety of opinions. One thing only is very clear: Jesus did not mean to say that "love" was a grace peculiar to the Gospel and was nowhere taught in the law of Moses. To say this is a mark of great ignorance. The point is set at rest by the words in Lev. 19:18: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." What then does this word "new" mean?

Some think, as Chrysostom, that our Lord refers to the degree with which Christians should love--even as He had loved them. This was a new and higher standard than had been yet known. Hitherto, as Cyril says, men were to love others as themselves. Now they were to love them more than themselves. Some think that our Lord refers to the great duty of Christians to love one another and cling to one another with a special and peculiar love, over and above the love they had generally to all mankind. This was in a sense a novelty. Some think that our Lord only meant that He renewed and recreated the great law of love and raised it to so much higher a position than it had ever held among the Jews, that it might be truly called a "new commandment." The parable of the good Samaritan shows how little the Jews realized the duty of loving their neighbors. He had in view the utter neglect into which the law of love had fallen among Jewish teachers like the Pharisees, and, like Isaac digging the earth out of the old well, would give the law a second beginning, as if it were new.

Some, as Maldonatus and Suicer, think that the expression is only a Hebraism and that "new," "rare," and "excellent" are synonymous. Thus a new name, a new song, a new wine. (Rev. 2:17, Ps. 96:1, Matt. 26:29.)

Perhaps there is something in each and all of these views. One thing is very certain: nothing could exalt the value of love so highly as to call it a "new commandment."

Scott observes that the law of love to others "was now to be explained with new clearness, enforced by new motives and obligations, illustrated by a new example, and obeyed in a new manner.

35.--[*By this shall all men know, etc.*] There can be no mistake about these words. Love was to be the grand characteristic, the distinguishing mark of Christ's disciples.

Let us note that our Lord does not name gifts, miracles, or intellectual

attainments as the evidence of discipleship, but love--the simple grace of love--a grace within reach of the poorest, lowliest believer. No love, no grace, no regeneration, no true Christianity!

Musculus observes, with withering scorn, how little likeness there is between our Lord's mark of discipleship and the dresses, beads, fastings, and self-imposed austerities of the Church of Rome.

Let us note what a heavy condemnation this verse pronounces on sectarianism, bigotry, narrow-mindedness, party-spirit, strife, bitterness, needless controversy between Christian and Christian.

Let us note how far from satisfactory is the state of those who are content with sound doctrinal opinions and orthodox correct views of the Gospel while in their daily life they give way to ill temper, ill nature, malice, envy, quarreling, squabbling, bickering, surliness, passion, snappish language, and crossness of word and manner. Such persons, whether they know it or not, are daily proclaiming that they are not Christ's disciples. It is nonsense to talk about justification, regeneration, election, conversion, and the uselessness of works unless people can see in us practical Christian love.

Whitby remarks that in the primitive ages the mutual love of Christians was notorious among heathens. "See how these Christians love one another" was a common saying, according to Tertullian. Even Julian the apostate proposed them to the heathen as a pattern in this respect.

36.--[*Simon Peter...where are you going?*] Here, as elsewhere, the forward, impulsive spirit of Peter prompts him to ask anxiously what our Lord meant by talking of going. "Where are you going?" Can we doubt, however, that in this question he was the spokesman of all?

How very little the disciples had ever comprehended our Lord's repeated saying that He must be taken prisoner, crucified, and die, we see in this place. Often as He had told them He must die, they had never realized it and are startled when He talks of going away. It is amazing how much religious teaching men may have and yet not take it in, receive or believe it, especially when it contradicts preconceived notions.

[*Jesus answered him, etc.*] Our Lord graciously explains here a part of His meaning. He does not explicitly tell Peter where He is going; but He tells him He is going to a place where Peter cannot follow Him now during his lifetime, but will follow Him after his death, at a future date. It is not unlikely, as Cyril observes, that these words, "You shall follow Me," pointed to the manner of Peter's death by crucifixion. He was to walk in his Master's steps and enter heaven by the same road.

37.--[*Peter said...follow you now, etc.*] This question shows how little Peter realized what our Lord fully meant, and the nearness of His death on the cross. "Why cannot I follow You now? Where is the place You are going to on earth where I am not willing and ready to follow You? I love You so much and am so determined to cling to You, that I am ready to lay down my life rather than be separate from You."

These words were well meant, and Peter never doubted, perhaps, that he could stand to them. But he did not know his own heart. There was more feeling than principle in his declaration. He did not see all that was in himself.

Let us note the mischief of self-ignorance. Let us pray for humility. Let us beware of over-confidence in our own courage and steadfastness. Pride goes before a fall.

38.--[*Jesus answered him, Will you lay, etc.*] Our Lord's meaning appears to be: "Will you really and truly lay down your life for Me? You little know your own weakness and feebleness. I tell you in the most solemn answer that this very night, before the cock crows, before sunrise, you, even you, will deny three times that you know Me. So far from laying down your life, you will try to save your life by cowardly denying that you have anything to do with Me."

Let us note the wonderful foreknowledge of our Lord. What an unlikely thing it seemed that such a professor should fall so far and so soon. Yet our Lord foresaw it all!

Let us note the wonderful kindness and condescension of Jesus. He knew perfectly well the weakness and feebleness of His chief disciple and yet never rejected him, and even raised him again after his fall. Christians should be men of pity and tender feelings toward weak brethren. Their inconsistencies may be very great and provoking, but we must never forget our Lord's dealing with Simon Peter.