

“A New Commandment”
The Gospel of John Chapter 13:18-38

Jesus has tenderly demonstrated to His apostles the true meaning of His Lordship by washing their feet. They will be blessed as they serve one another and those that will be entrusted to their care. But Jesus must first identify His betrayer. He quotes from Psalm 41:9. Middle Eastern cultures put great emphasis on the fellowship around a meal. Judas Iscariot is present and eating, yet he will betray the Master! The eleven must be forewarned in order to be forearmed.

Christ knew that His apostles would recognize that He is the “I Am” by His prophecy of Judas’ betrayal (Ex. 3:14; John 8:58). Paramount in Jesus’ ministry was their recognition of His deity (Matt. 16:13-20). John’s very purpose in writing this gospel was that his readers would believe in Jesus as the Christ and have life in His name (John 20:31; Acts 4:12).

John began his gospel with the Word as God (John 1:1). His portrayal of the deity of Christ is clear but neither does he neglect Jesus’ humanity (John 1:14, 11:35). To be betrayed by one so close and even at the supper table is deeply troubling (Greek word *tarasso*, to stir or agitate; Matt. 2:3; John 11:33; 1Pet. 3:14) to the Lord.

The prediction of the betrayal takes the apostles completely by surprise. John’s description of the events leads most commentators to surmise that the “disciple whom Jesus loved” is John himself. The apostles question who will betray the Lord (Matt. 26:22). Surely not Judas, as he was so trusted he carried their money bag! Satan (the accuser) himself enters Judas, who will now do his bidding (Matt. 12:45; Mark 5:13). As believers, we betray Christ when we fail to follow Him.

Jesus could say that He is now glorified even though He had not yet endured the cross nor resurrected or ascended into heaven because God’s will cannot be thwarted (Acts 2:23). To help them in His absence, Jesus gives them a new commandment. The Greek word translated new is *kainos*, which means new in kind or quality, not simply new chronologically. Although the commandments to love were already given in the Old Testament (Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18), Jesus has demonstrated His love in washing their feet and now going to the cross (Rom. 5:8). They (and we) must love one another with Jesus’ love (Eph. 5:2, 25; 1John 2:14, 4:7-21).

