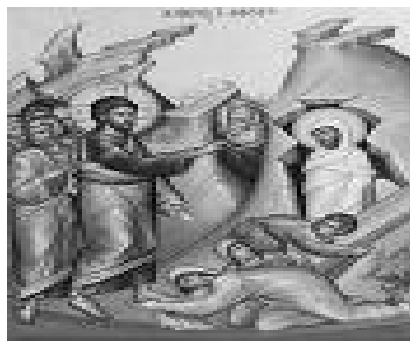


## The New Commandment

This emphasis on a new type of morality is given even greater rein in John's Gospel. Although there is no teaching on specific moral issues in this Gospel, there is the presentation of a new moral framework within which to live. This is based on the need to have **absolute love for your fellow man or woman** and its importance is stressed by being given the status of a new commandment (Jn.13). The positive example of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples demonstrates its practical effect in an unambiguous way.



As if to remove any doubt about its significance, Jesus repeats the instruction in two different ways (Jn.15).

**First**, he emphasises the need for his followers to be a part of him, as if they were the branch of a tree. Then, just as the Father and Jesus as Son have a mutual deep love so must the disciples for one another.

**Second**, they must imitate his great love for them, a love so great that he is prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice and die for them, **'no greater love has a man than to lay down his life for a friend'**.

## Implications for Today

Jesus' condemnation of the attitude of the Pharisees must not be seen as something that does not concern us today. We all know about Jesus' command to love our neighbour but do we **really** use that command as a basis upon which to make decisions on modern moral issues? Or do we cling to unimportant matters of detail and judge others unfairly as a result, or alternatively use them as an excuse for not doing something that the command to love demands of us? We all need to reflect on this.

# Jesus in the Gospels

## 8. Jesus' Moral Teaching



## Questions For Reflection

1. How did Jesus show he had authority for his moral teachings?
2. What is the significance, if any, of the Sermon on the Mount?
3. Why does only John record the giving of the new commandment?

## Jesus' Moral Teaching

Jesus' moral teaching is portrayed in the Gospels using several different methods.

He sets moral standards on particular issues, either in a general discourse as in the Sermon on the Mount, or in a specific discourse in a set situation. He also challenges accepted norms and attitudes by contention with the established interpreters of the Law, like the Pharisees. Most importantly, he steps outside the prescriptive nature of legal detail to establish universal principles based on love, that would be valid for all times.



## The Sermon on the Mount

Matthew's Gospel collects many of Jesus' moral dictums all together in one place (Mtt.5-7) and presents Jesus as a new lawgiver in what is known as the Sermon on the Mount, paralleling the giving of the Judaic Law on Sinai.

What is important is the way that Jesus states that he has not come to destroy the Law but to fulfil it. He identifies himself with particular laws and then develops them in a new, original way that goes beyond their original setting. He usually begins with the phrase **'you have heard it said ...'** to refer to some law, then goes on to say, **'but I say to you'** before expanding that law.

In acting this way, Jesus is implicitly claiming the authority to do so, and this can mean nothing else but that he is God's special messenger, not necessarily God himself as some commentators maintain, but nevertheless someone of the stature of Moses.

The issues Jesus addresses and expands concern murder, adultery, divorce, oath taking, revenge, love of neighbour, the responsibility to give alms, the attitude to money and to judging others. It is summarised in the Golden Rule **'do unto others as you would like them to do to you'**.

Although the overall structure in Matthew is somewhat artificial, nevertheless the fact that a similar sermon is found in Luke 6, albeit in a different setting, supports the view that several pieces of this sermon may actually have been delivered in one discourse.



## The Social Gospel

Luke's Gospel is sometimes termed a social Gospel because of its special emphasis on how to live a good life and its concern for the poor. Luke's parallel sermon (Lk.6) to Matthew's contains Beatitudes like Matthew's (but only four opposed to Matthew's eight) but three of his four relate to material conditions like poverty and hunger. In addition he has three admonitions against the rich and selfish.

Luke champions the poor, and teaches that riches do not bring genuine happiness. What is more, those with the good fortune to be rich have a responsibility to those who are not. This is seen in those parables that are unique to Luke: the parable of the rich but foolish farmer who built new barns to store his great harvest (ch.12), the rich man and Lazarus (ch.16), and the Good Samaritan (ch.10). Luke also includes occasions when Jesus exhorted people to share with the poor (ch.3 & 14).

## The Greatest Commandments

As well as addressing specific moral issues like divorce and the love of riches (Mtt.19), Jesus also provides the framework for a new approach, a new vision of how to act and behave. He answers the Pharisee's question about the greatest commandment by following it up with what he calls the second greatest, **'the need to love your neighbour as yourself'** (Mtt.22 // Mk.12 // Lk.10). In Luke, this is amplified with the parable of the Good Samaritan to show that the command extended beyond the traditional requirement of considering only fellow Jews as the neighbour concerned, to include all people, even the despised Samaritans.