

Law School Sermon Series – The Law Of Love

Matthew 22:34-40

34 But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.

35 Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,

36 Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38 This is the first and great commandment.

39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

The Greatest Virtue

Someone has said that love may not make the world go around, but it makes the trip worthwhile. Those words perhaps gather up the sentiment of the world that the sweetest and most exhilarating of all emotions and experiences is love.

In whatever age or with whatever group of people, it has been the almost universal belief that love is the greatest thing in life, the virtue par excellence. Consequently, volumes upon volumes of poems, songs, plays, novels, and films have been produced about love. Nothing is sweeter than love, nothing more courageous, nothing higher, nothing wider, nothing more pleasant, nothing fuller nor better in heaven and earth.

God's Word concurs that love is the greatest virtue, but the love that it elevates as supreme is of a much deeper and more substantive kind than that which the world understands and admires. In response to the third in a series of three questions posed by His adversaries for the purpose of discrediting and entrapping Him, Jesus declared that agape love is the supreme divine requirement of men, both in regard to Himself and in regard to other men. It is strange, when one comes to think of it, that we should be commanded to love. Love is a feeling that does not spring up at the summons of another. Love has an independence of its own. It comes and it goes, it waxes and wanes, without any conscious effort of our will, almost without our knowing why.

But to the average Jew of our Lord's time, familiar with the words from his childhood and bound by his religion to recite the passage from Deuteronomy twice every day, the commandment would have presented no difficulty. To Jesus Himself it presented no difficulty. That was not because He was careless as to whether He was commanding an impossibility. On the contrary, He was always most careful not to force His teaching on men against their judgment or will. He always has (and always will) respect human personality. He took into account the mental and moral atmosphere of the individual soul. When He said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," Jesus was not insisting on something that men could not do; he was setting an ideal before them that it was in their power to attain, if only they made the effort.

Jesus was not calling upon men to do what was completely foreign to their nature, what they had no power or wish to perform; but was appealing to something in the human heart which, He knew, was ready to hear and to make answer to His call. In spite of all that may be truly said about "the natural man" being at enmity with God, the deepest feeling and the deepest want of the human heart is to love its Creator. Love cannot be constrained by a command, but it can be won by an appeal. An appealing love draws out an answering love, and it was this appealing love of God, which Jesus made known to men. There are masses of men who do not love God; indeed, who hardly think of Him at all, but all have the power, and all would have the desire to love Him, if only they could be brought to think of Him and to feel the reality of His love for them.

The Law Of Love

The Law of Love is a natural force of humanity. It will help us to understand this principle if we first distinguish it from some other principles of our nature.

The Law of Love is to be distinguished from the principle of will, and in some regards is indeed to be opposed to it. All human lives that are following the Law of Will, of Self, of Individualism, are breaking life's true law, and missing life's true aim!

Merv Rosell once said, "When another man's burden becomes more important than your burden, that is the beginning of love."

Robert Schuller said, "Love is deciding to make your problem my problem."

Og Mandino said: "True love is a gift on which no return is demanded. To love unselfishly is its own reward. To love for fulfillment, satisfaction, or pride is no love."

It is ministering to others to which we are called by the Law of Love. It has been said "the train of brotherly love rides on the track of concern and compassion." Therefore, the proof of love is in what we do and not in what we say.

The Law of Love is to be distinguished from the principle of knowledge. Knowledge is not a primary fact of life, and can never become an ultimate law. Paul told the church at Corinth in the thirteenth chapter of his first letter that knowledge shall vanish away, but love will never fail.

Finally, the Law of Love is wholly opposed to the spirit of fear. Fear is not natural to man, though most of us would be hard pressed to believe that to be true. Fear only came to man when tempted by knowledge. Man transgressed the obedience of love, and having transgressed he hid himself from the presence of God. And Adam represents us all. We hide from God because we have sinned.

When we kneel at the foot of the cross, and feel that because God loves us we must love God, we learn again the Law of Life, the Law of Being: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." God has made you to love Him, to have communion with Him. And in that perfect communion the Law of God is not broken. And that law is, that with all your heart, with all your being, with all the powers that you have, shall you love God. Then reason shall be linked to heaven, and affection linked to heaven, and conscience linked to heaven, and idea and imagination... And all the powers of mind and soul linked to heaven by the eternal principle of love.

The Law Of Love To God

Psalm 31:23 O love the Lord, all ye his saints: for the Lord preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer.

If we are called the saints of the Lord, do we need to be exhorted to love Him? If we do, shame on us! And we do, I am quite sure; so let us be ashamed and confounded that it should ever be needful to urge us to love our Lord! Considering that God has done so much for us, and manifested such wondrous love to such unworthy ones as we are, we ought to love Him as naturally as sparks of fire ascend towards the night sky, or as the waters of the river run towards the sea! It should be second nature to us from now on to love the Lord without the slightest prompting! What the Law required, the gospel should have wrought in us, namely, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our mind, and with all our soul, and with all our strength!

But, brothers and sisters, we do need this exhortation. In fact, today we ought to take it in and hear it as if it had been spoken personally to each one of us who are the Lord's saints: "O love the Lord!" Let your attention be on nothing else but this; rid yourself of every other thought; and let every emotion and all your affections run in this one channel toward God: "O love the Lord; all ye His saints!"

In our text, Jesus used "heart," "soul," and "mind" to express the dimensions of our love for God. The terms should be taken together to mean, "Love God with your whole being." "Heart" refers primarily to our emotional response; and when we think about love, we usually stop with the emotions. The helpful roles of "soul" and "mind" become clear when our emotions (or heart) fail us.

"Soul" includes the willful, decision-making part of us. Loving God with our soul covers those times when we love God apart from our feelings, such as when we truly forgive another while part of us feels like exacting revenge on that person. "Mind" refers to an active component of our love for God. In a world where faith is often described as characteristic of people who don't think, Jesus's words point to the importance of engaging our mind as a central aspect of what we believe

The word for "love" is *agapao*, which means "totally unselfish love"; a love that human beings are capable of only with the help of the Holy Ghost. God's Spirit helps us love Him as we ought. You see, God wants our warmhearted love and devotion, not just our obedience. The heart is the center of desires and affections, the soul is a person's "being" and uniqueness, and the mind is the center of a person's intellect. To love God in this way is to fulfill completely all the commandments regarding one's "vertical" relationship.

The Law Of Love To Man

Loving God is the first and greatest commandment; but Jesus did not stop there; he put an addendum upon it...

Jesus said, "And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the prophets," (Matthew 22:40 NKJV). This is the second law; and it is equally important as the first. This second law focuses upon our "horizontal" relationships; those with fellow humanity.

Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, writes: "For the whole Law is summed up in one commandment: 'Love your neighbor as you love yourself,'" (Galatians 5:14 – TEV). Jesus meant, and Paul meant, too, that you can't love your neighbor in Christ's sense without implying all that Christ was and stands for. It's easy to love Christ the more you come to see and know Him as Lord and Savior; however, the more you see of your neighbor, the less easy it is to love him.

A person cannot maintain a good vertical relationship with God without also maintaining the horizontal relationships with his or her neighbor. On the mount of transfiguration, Peter proclaimed: "Lord, it is good for us to be here, let us make three tabernacles, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elias," and stay here in the cloudless serenity of this mountain-top experience. Immediately upon descending from the mountain-top they are met by a concerned father with a lunatic son, and Jesus, by His actions, informs Peter and the others that you cannot love God without loving your neighbor. The Greek word translated "neighbor" refers to fellow human beings in general. The love a person has for himself or herself (in the sense of looking out for oneself, caring about one's best interest, etc.) should be continued, but it should also be directed toward others.

Jesus informs us that on these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets. The Ten Commandments and all the other Old Testament laws are summarized in these two laws. By fulfilling these two commands to love God totally and love others as oneself, a person will keep all the other commandments.

One Small Example Of Love

On December 14, 1937, under the guise of Asian Solidarity, the Japanese Kwantung Army captured and closed off the city of Nanking, and then conducted six weeks of the most brutal and supervised terror imaginable. According to several historians, somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000 Chinese were executed, of whom, not fewer than 40,000 were innocent civilians.

Thousands of suspected Chinese military who had shed their uniforms and adopted civilian attire, were rounded up, tied singly, and in groups, marched to the edge of the Yangtze River and machine-gunned at close range. Their bodies were pushed into the river. Women and girls were raped repeatedly by Japanese soldiers who then bayoneted them and mutilated their bodies. Male Chinese were machine-gunned en masse, 20,000 in a single day. Others were used for bayonet and sword practice. No women, from the aged to children, were safe from the ravages of drunken and howling Japanese soldiers. Soon the Yangtze River was a human logjam, thick with floating corpses. On December 17, when General Matsui triumphantly entered the ravaged city riding a white horse, the gutters ran red with blood and bodies still covered the streets and alleys.

It was in the midst of atrocities such as these that a certain village pastor answered a knock on his door and found a Japanese soldier with a Chinese woman outside. He had seen much of Japanese methods and was, therefore, amazed when this enemy soldier said to him, "This woman is in great danger so I bring her to you for safety. I, too, am a Christian." This Japanese soldier had at least enough of an understanding of the second command as laid out by Christ that he was able to, in some small way, exhibit the Law of Love to his "neighbor." Realizing that he would not want to be treated to such atrocities himself, he did the right thing by protecting at least one who was to be faced with certain abuse and death. This Japanese soldier was governed by a law higher than that of the Emperor of Japan or any of the Emperor's military commanders; he was governed by the Law of Love.

The Law of Love dictates that we will most naturally do right by others.

The God whom we serve is not just the God of Love...

The Scripture bears out emphatically and unequivocally, "God is love," (1 John 4:8, 16).

1 John 4:8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

1 John 4:16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

There is power in love! When we love unconditionally, forgiving others becomes a rather simple thing to do. And, because God loves us unconditionally, He has no problem forgiving us when we fall short of the mark in serving Him.

Warren Wiersbe said: "Love does not mean that I must like a person and agree with him on everything. I may not like his vocabulary or his habits. I may not want him for an intimate friend (but I can still love him). Christian love means treating others the way God has treated me."