

THE SECOND GREATEST COMMAND

PREFACE

- This morning I want to talk about love, in particular the love that we ought to have for one another.
- Love is essential for all of us. We all want to be loved, and we all want to have someone to love.
- Most of us are blessed to have either friends, a family, or a spouse we enjoy a loving relationship with.
- Most of us have people in our lives who are hard to love, whether friends, family or spouse.
- It is the human condition to desire love - both to give and receive - but we're not awesome at it.
- If I had to name one of the most prominent topics of biblical guidance that we do here at the church - if I had to name one area that causes the most heartache and hardship - it would be all the drama and turmoil surrounding relationships.
- This morning I want to zero in on the Christian responsibility to love.

LOVE, THE GREATEST COMMAND

An interesting directive was issued by Jesus during Passion Week. It is well worth rewinding to the final week of Jesus' ministry and consider one of His final orders He gave to us.

MATTHEW 22:34-40

34 But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. 35 Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" 37 Jesus said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

This commandment is not without significance and has a lot more weight behind it.

Background:

- Tuesday of Passion Week.
- On the previous day, Jesus had cleansed the Temple in a rather demonstrative way.
- On this particular day, the various religious groups will question His authority.
- The detestation they had for Jesus was driving a line of questioning that they hoped would indict Him.
- One of the final acts of this exchange with the Jewish authorities was when an expert in the law (a Scribe), asks him a potentially provoking question.
- The Pharisees had developed a system with 613 laws.
- Jesus responds with an answer that will resonate in every believer's heart and mind until His return: love God, then love others.

DEUTERONOMY 6:5

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

Out of all things that Jesus could have mandated for the Christian, He simply chose *love Me* and then *love others*. He didn't say *get baptized, go to church, go to Bible college, pray for an hour a day* etc. Rather, He placed a premium on love.

Just to be clear—to love your neighbor *as your self* is not an endorsement for self-love; rather, it is for us to measure the love for others based on how you wish to be loved.

ROMANS 13:8-10

8 Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

- Jesus subsumes the man's whole moral duty under these two commandments.
- All things are satisfied in the commandment of love.
- Paul concisely states this truth in Galatians.

GALATIANS 5:14

For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

- These two great commandments are the sum and substance of the Law of the Prophets (V40).
- If you want to be legalistic about anything, be legalistic about those two things only.

WHO IS OUR NEIGHBOR?

Luke 10:29 - In the parable of the Good Samaritan a lawyer asks Jesus: "*What shall I do to inherit eternal life?*".

What does Jesus answer with? "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.*"

The lawyer responds with "*and who is my neighbor?*" The parable goes on to clearly state that your neighbor is anyone you cross paths with.

NEIGHBOR (PLĒSION)

1. A friend
2. Any other person, and where two are concerned, the other (thy fellow man, thy neighbor), according to the Jews, any member of the Hebrew nation and commonwealth

3. According to Christ, any other man irrespective of nation or religion, with whom we live or whom we chance to meet

- A neighbor is anyone that is within your proximately, anyone within your reach.
- It is not limited to your residential next door neighbor.
- There is something interesting about Jesus' response, which I'm sure jumped out to you, as well.

INSEPARABLE COMMANDS

Verse 36 the scribe asks: "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus gave him two commandments.

ILLUSTRATION - WHEN I ASK OLIVER WHOM HE LOVES THE MOST (BETWEEN ME OR HIS MUM)?

- This is where we begin to really see the importance of the passage.
- You can't have one love without the other.
- They are inextricably connected: to love God with all your body, soul, and mind, and to love others, are inseparable.
- First and foremost, when we are in a right-standing, loving relationship with God, we will be compelled to be in a right-standing loving relationship with each other.
- Loving your neighbor is a natural and necessary extension of a true whole hearted love for God, because your neighbor is made in the image of God.
- To the extent that we are walking in the Spirit and pursuing the righteousness of God is the extent that our relationships are manifesting the attributes of love.
- Our *vertical* relationship with God, enables our *horizontal* relationships with one another.

1 JOHN 4:11

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

1 JOHN 4:12(B)

If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.

The most supreme output of the Christians' life must be love. However, recognizing the command is one thing — understanding and practicing biblical love is another.

APPLYING LOVE TO OUR RELATIONSHIP

- The majority of life's problems are entangled in our relationships.
- When you were in school, who would have thought that the most useful thing on your report card would be "plays well with others"?
- Therefore, the beneficiary of learning to love others will be our relationships, namely our children, marriage, and friendships.

- Our relationships desperately need to be hijacked by love.
- Relational health demands love.
- The people around you are either blessed or burdened by how you love or don't love them.

At most weddings, the pastor will cite [1 Corinthians 13](#), the love chapter.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

[4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.](#)

Does this feel like a tall order?

EPHESIANS 5:1-2

[1 Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.](#)

Would anyone here consider their default condition as a *sweet-smelling aroma*? Within ourselves we are rather deficient in operating in love.

THE CAPACITY TO LOVE

We are endowed with the capacity to walk in love, because of the love that was first extended to us. It is only in and through the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us, that we might find the strength and ability to love those around us.

By our own effort, we can probably love one another with limited success, but it will be short lived. It won't take long, and it won't take much for the old man to make an appearance. Why? Because without the Lord, we will always revert back to our prideful ways.

Pride is the primary agent that threatens to hinder our ability to love extravagantly; and the only antidote to that is to love God with all you heart, soul and mind. So, how do we do that?

1) GOD'S WORD

We are to love God by loving His Word.

2) PRAYER

We are to be in continual prayer for all things pertaining to life, especially for our relationships.

3) WALKING IN THE SPIRIT

We are to walk in obedience to His Word, throw off sin, pursue holiness, die to ourselves, be consumed by His Word— this is a life walking in the Spirit.

GALATIANS 5:25-26

25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

- *Walking in the Spirit* is worthy of its own study. For those who are interested, [Galatians 5:16-26](#) and [Romans 8:1-17](#) are good places to start.
- When we are in His Word, walking in obedience, and praying for God's will, we will see each other remarkably different. Not to mention, we will begin to produce the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.
- We need to see others through the eyes of Christ.
- This is where we see the necessity for the first commandment to enable the second.

PUTTING ON LOVE

COLOSSIANS 3:14

But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

In the Greek language there are three greek words for love: eros (romantic), phileo (friendship) and agape (sacrificial love).

Agape love is not a feeling, but it is an act of the will.

ATTRIBUTES OF LOVE:

Humility, forgiveness, patience, long suffering, benevolence, serving, compassion, mercy, friendliness, generosity, courteous, confrontation, selflessness, kindness, esteeming others, tenderhearted.

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

GALATIANS 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control.

- Here is the unavoidable inference—if you are not putting these things on, then by default you are putting on the inverse of these attributes.
- The most useful metric to assess our love for others is whether humility is running amok.
- When humility abounds, we will inevitably be esteeming others.
- We need to put these attributes on. It is an act of the will.

PHILIPPIANS 2:3

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

THE BODY OF CHRIST

The most prominent metaphor used in the New Testament is that as believers, we are the body.

Body of Christ scriptures:

- 1 Corinthians 10:16-17
- 1 Corinthians 12:12-14
- 1 Corinthians 12:27
- Colossians 1:18
- Ephesians 5:23
- Colossians 3:15
- Ephesians 1:22
- Ephesians 4:11
- Ephesians 2:19
- Romans 12:4

JOHN 13:34-35

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

In light of the fact that we know we are all one in Christ and are connected as Children of God, wouldn't our love and affection for one another be obvious to all?

The world looks to us as ambassadors of Christ, it would be a shame to undermine His good name because we are not characterized by our love for one another.

UNITY OF BELIEVERS

PSALMS 133:1

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity!

Diversity, unity, and harmony does not happen by itself. Even though we are *connected* as the body, it doesn't mean that we are *unified*.

GEESE FIGURED OUT HOW TO BE ONE BODY:

- They provide lift for one another
- They honk at the other geese to communicate
- When one falls weak or ill two other geese fall back with the injured

We need to heighten our awareness to the needs of others. We need to encourage each other and we need to lift each other up.

FIGHT FOR UNITY (LOVE IS WAR)

- There is tremendous diversity in the church.
- We all have unique personalities and dispositions.
- The church is a melting pot of believers who bring unique blessing and baggage.
- All Christians are broken, and we all bring dysfunction into the church.
- Regardless of compatibility, we are commanded to be united.

1 PETER 3:8-9

8 Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; 9 not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.

PEANUTS CARTOON: LUCY ACCUSES LINUS OF NOT LOVING HIS FELLOW MAN, LINUS REPLIES WITH "I LOVE MANKIND... IT'S PEOPLE I CAN'T STAND"

- Whether we like it or not, we all need to play in the sandpit together.
- You can't just throw your toys out of the crib when things don't go your way.
- Loving those who don't threaten our sense of well being is relatively doable, but the moment someone makes us feel something we don't like, we opt out of the love commandment.
- Maintaining and preserving our relationships with one another is hard work.
- Personal sanctification usually utilizes our relationships.
- The go-to weapon in relational conflict is humility.
- None of us are issued a hall pass to be excused from loving exceptionally.
- There is nothing charming about blaming others ([Genesis 3](#)).
- The right thing v. the justified thing.
- At the root of any relational conflict is pride; pride is cancer in the body of Christ.
- We need to forgive another and/or ask for forgiveness.

EXAMPLES OF GOD'S DESIRE FOR RESTORATION

[1 Corinthians 1:10](#) Paul pleads for there to be no division between God's people.

[Matthew 18:15-16](#) Jesus exhorts believers to confront one another.

[1 Peter 4:8-9](#) Peter implores God's people to have a *fervent love for one another*, and that *love covers a multitude of sin*.

[Romans 12:18](#) - Paul challenges the Romans to *as much as possible, live peaceably with all men*.

[Matthew 5:23-24](#) - God doesn't want your offering if you are at odds with your Christian brother.

[Acts 15:36-41](#) - Paul and Barnabas had to figure out their differences

[Philippians 4:2-7](#) - Paul requires Euodia and Syntyche to stop their conflict.

Humility is the catalyst for healing and unity.

CONCLUSION

In [1 Corinthians 13](#), Paul reiterates that all things are subservient to love. In verse two of chapter 13, he says even if you understand *all* the mysterious of God, have *full* knowledge on *all* things, have *all* faith, and can move mountains, and you don't have love, then you are nothing.

- God is honored in your right standing relationships with each other.
- Love can be hard work, but we need to take back that ground that Satan has robbed from us.
- In the bigger scheme of things, very little matters.
- Challenge - reach out and humble yourself to God's orders.
- Maybe the other party isn't worth it, but God is.
- I have spoken with all of your spouses and friends, and they have all asked me to let you know that today's message is for you.

EPHESIANS 4:1-6

[1](#) I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, [2](#) with all lowliness and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, [3](#) endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. [4](#) There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; [5](#) one Lord, one faith, one baptism; [6](#) one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

This passage reminds us of three aspects of our relationships with others:
Put on love ([V2](#)), walk in unity ([V3](#)), we are the body ([V4](#)).