

The Great Commandment (Part II)

Matthew 22:39-40

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Introduction: What would be the opposite of loving one's neighbor? Would it be to hate him or her? Rather than following the Golden Rule of Christ, "*Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law & the prophets*" (Matthew 7:12), some render evil for evil. Consider the story of the woman who was diagnosed by her doctor as having rabies. Knowing she might not survive, she took out a piece of paper & began furiously writing. The doctor asked whether or not she was writing out her last will & testament. She replied, "No, I'm making a list of the people I'm going to bite." Then there is the account of the little girl who had to be chastened by her mother during the day. Still angry with her mother, she knelt down beside her bed to say her prayers while her mother waited to tuck her in bed. She prayed for her Dad, her brothers & sister, her aunts, uncles, & grandparents. After saying "Amen," she said to her mother, "I guess you noticed I left you out." Unfortunately, she also left God out of her prayers, as she prayed from an unforgiving heart. But notice here in our text the second part of the great commandment. Continuing with the principle of love (:37), Christ again quotes the O.T., here Leviticus 19:18, "*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*" Note with me here this morning: the comparison (:39a), the commandment (:39b), & the conclusion (:40). Again I challenge you, "Do you have a genuine commitment to the great commandment?" Will you love God supremely & your neighbor sacrificially?

I. The comparison (:39a) > "*like unto it*"

A. Like in nature – a commandment to love:

1. Love for God is evidenced by love to man (see I John 5:1-3).
2. Without love for man, there is no evidence of salvation (see I John 3:14).

B. Like in necessity – a commandment of importance:

1. In **priority** – demanded of us first of all.
2. In **primacy** – to love intelligently, purposely, sacrificially [Illustrate: "Brethren, We Have Met to Worship" – verse 4, "Let us love our God supremely, let us love each other too..."]

Summary: Note the parallel account given in Mark 12. See verse 33, "*...more than all whole burnt offerings & sacrifices.*" [Indicating the superiority of the moral law over the ceremonial? Compare over-emphasis upon outward standards today.]

II. The commandment (:39b) > "*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*"

A. The O. T. quotation – Leviticus 19:18

1. Consider how often we "wrong" (sin against?) ourselves, yet we so soon forgive ourselves & it does not lessen our love of self – so should we love our neighbor.
2. As we would prevent hurting ourselves & promote our good, so should we do so for our neighbor.

B. The N. T. qualification – Luke 10:29-37

1. Love of self vs. "self-esteem":
 - a. Love for self is assumed as a reality ("fools & fanatics excepted") – see Eph. 5:28 ["Self-love is normal, but sinful man can pervert this into a selfishness that loves only himself" (Neal).]

b. Love for self does not excuse sinfully centering one's love only on self.
Summary: There is no command in the Bible to love one self. God has placed in every human being the principle of self-love & self-preservation (fear of dying; getting lost in the woods, drowning, etc.).

2. Love of neighbor:

- a. A love equal to that of one's love for self.
- b. A love evidenced to those we come into contact with (desire to meet their physical &/or spiritual needs).

Application: When was the last time you gave out a tract or shared your testimony, or invited someone to church?

Summary: How do we show such love? "Freely & readily, sincerely & unfeignedly, tenderly & compassionately, constantly & perseveringly." Compassion for the needy (see I John 3:17-18) & for the lost (Matthew 9:36-38). It is our responsibility to seek the greatest good of our neighbor.

III. The **conclusion** (:40) > "*On these two commandments hang all the law & the prophets.*"

A. The **unique combination** – "*On these two commandments*"

1. Though both of these commandments are found in the O. T., no prior teacher (before Christ) had combined them together as a summary of man's duty.
2. There is a similar summary of the law given elsewhere in the N. T. > Romans 13:10; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8; I John 4:20.

B. The **united foundation** – "*Hang all the law & the prophets*"

1. Using the imagery of a peg on which garments hang, Christ declares that these 2 commandments uphold all the other precepts of the law & prophets (& cf. Mt. 7:12).
[Note also the imagery could be as a door hangs on its hinges, or a nail on the wall – there is dependence upon one common principle.]
2. All the other commandments in the O. T. may be included under one or the other of these commands [consider: The first command (Love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, soul, & mind) incorporates the first 4 of the 10 commandments, while the second part (Love thy neighbor as thyself) incorporates the last 6 commandments.]

Summary: "There is no earnest & intelligent love to God without love to our neighbor; & the love of our neighbor derives its fundamental & necessary sanction from love to God" (Broadus).

Conclusion: It is significant that the normally argumentative scribes & Pharisees have nothing further to say. They offer no rebuttal or follow-up challenge. They could not argue with truth presented in this fashion. There was a saying attributed to one of the early church Fathers: "Love – and do as you like." The saying implied that loving God & man rightly would keep one from license. Proper love for mankind precludes doing anything that would hurt our neighbor & love for God assures us that what we like & choose to do will be in accordance with His will & redound to His glory (see Psalm 40:8).

Have you experienced God's love in salvation? Do you know for sure that you have been saved? If so, do you love God supremely? Do you love your neighbor sacrificially? Does your life reflect an earnest desire to fulfill this great commandment? As we saw last week, such love is not human or natural, but supernatural. The Spirit-filled believer (Romans 5:5) allows the Holy Spirit to have full control as He ministers God's love to us & manifests God's love through us. The Holy Spirit enables us to love God supremely & our neighbor sacrificially! Do you have a genuine commitment to the Great Commandment?