

LAW AND LOVE

(by Boyce Mouton)

“One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ‘Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?’ Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matt 22:35-40)

Nothing could possibly be more clear! The two greatest commandments in the Law involved love. There were Ten Commandments written in stone, and over 600 other commandments in the Mosaic Law. Jesus said, however, that “all the Law and the Prophets” could be suspended on only two commandments.

1 The first commandment is to love God in the proper way. God is a Jealous God and will not be trivialized. We must love Him completely with every aspect of our being.

2 The second commandment is similar. It also involves love. This time, however, we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

Jesus continued, **ON THESE TWO COMMANDMENTS HANG ALL THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS!**

Note! There is no third priority. These two commandments include it all! The significance of these two commandments cannot be overemphasized. We will be reminded of these two commandments when we stand up before God in Judgement for Jesus said that the words He had spoken would judge us in the last day (Jn. 12:48).

In order to see these two commandments in their proper perspective, please consider the following.

FACT # 1 GOD DOES NOT CHANGE

- **“I the LORD do not change.” (Mal 3:6)**
- **“God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind.” (Num 23:19)**
- **“He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind.” (1 Sam 15:29)**
- **“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.” (Heb 13:8)**
- **“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.” (James 1:17)**

FACT # 2 GOD’S PLANS HAVE NOT CHANGED

- “No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.” (1 Cor 2:7)
- “and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Eph 3:9-11)
- “. . . This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,” (2 Tim 1:9)
- “a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time,” (Titus 1:2)
- “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.” (1 Pet 1:18-20)

CONCLUSION

- Since God doesn't change.
- And since God's plans do not change.
- God has always wanted the same thing.

“This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother” (Jn 3:11-12)

The necessity of love is not just a Christian doctrine. It goes back beyond the Law of Moses to the very beginning of time. Cain tried to love God. At least he brought an offering to the Lord. Obviously, however, he did not love his brother because he murdered him. The Apostle John, by inspiration, said it was impossible to love God without loving your brother. If a man claims to love God, but does not love his brother, he is a liar (1 Jn. 4:20).

IT DOESN'T MATTER WHEN YOU WERE BORN, OR WHERE YOU LIVED, GOD HAS ALWAYS WANTED THE SAME THING! HE WANTS US TO LOVE HIM WITH ALL OF OUR HEART, MIND, SOUL, AND STRENGTH, AND HE ALSO WANTS US TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBORS IN THE SAME WAY WE LOVE OURSELVES.

This universal standard will be remembered in Judgement. We will not be judged on the basis of a religious technicality, but by the way we have demonstrated love. Love demands that we meet the needs of those who were hungry, thirsty, strangers, sick, cold, and in prison. It is on this basis that we will be judged (Matt. 25:34 - 40). This standard is nothing new. As John wrote - this is the same message we have heard from the beginning. The book of Job is very old. Some think it was written before the books of Moses. Note how Job's love prepared him for the

Judgement. Job rescued the poor, the fatherless, those abandoned, the dying, the widow, the blind, the widow, the crippled and the needy (see Job 29:7 - 17). This was the same message in the Law of Moses (Deut. 6:5, and Lev. 19:18). This is the same message given by the Prophet Isaiah over 700 years before Jesus was born (Is. 58:6 - 7). While the commandments may have been different, the purpose of the commandments has always been the same.

THE PURPOSE OF GOD'S COMMANDMENTS

“The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” (1 Tim 1:5)

Throughout the course of human history God has given many different commandments to His people. While the commandments were different, the goal of the commandments was always the same. The reason why God gave all of His commandments was to produce love.

For example, if a man defrauded his neighbor he obviously didn't love him. Therefore the Law of Moses required him to do two things. He was to make an offering to God. This would remind him of his need to love God. Next, he had to pay a 20% penalty when he returned what he had stolen from his neighbor. This would remind him to love his neighbor (see Lev. 6:1 - 7). The commandments were to make a sacrifice and pay a debt, but the purpose of these commandments was to produce love.

The idea that the eternal purpose of God was merely to see blood run down an altar is preposterous. The prophet Micah pointed this out in Micah 6:6 - 8. Micah reasoned that if God was pleased with one offering, then why not offer a thousand rams and really make Him happy? If pouring out a little oil pleased God, why not pour out a river of oil? This, of course, is ridiculous! The real purpose of God in giving commands was revealed by Micah in verse 8. It is so that men would “act justly, . . . love mercy, . . . and walk humbly with God”. Or as Paul wrote to Timothy: “the goal of this command is love”.

Do you understand this principle? Parents can probably understand it more readily than others. Let us suppose that two brothers have been in a fight and their parents “command” them to stand in the corner. The goal the parents is that the boys will quit fighting and love one another. The command is to “stand in the corner,” but the goal of the commandment is love. So also the commands of God in Scripture are designed to produce love. Jesus said that if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, then leave your gift and first be reconciled to your brother (Matt. 5:23).

THE NECESSITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34-35)

For thousands of years the world has been plagued with wars and rumors of wars. Some day, however, men will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Some day men will study war no more. That day, however, will not come without the Holy Spirit.

Take, for example, the disciples of Jesus. These men knew the message of love given in

the Law and the Prophets, but they lacked the power to put that message into practice in their own lives. They even heard Jesus demonstrate and teach that same message for three years. For example in Matt. 5:43 - 48 and Lk. 6:27 - 36 In these verses Jesus stressed the importance of loving our enemies. If we only love those who love us we do not manifest the true nature of God's love. God loves everybody, and if we are to be like God, then we should love everybody too. The disciples heard that message but didn't put it into practice. **THEY DIDN'T EVEN LOVE ONE ANOTHER, LET ALONE THEIR ENEMIES!**

- The disciples constantly disputed among themselves as to who would be the greatest (Mk. 9:33 - 35).
- The mother of Zebedee's children came to Jesus and asked that her two sons be on the right and left hand of His throne. When the other ten disciples heard this they were indignant with the two brothers (Matt. 20:20 - 24).
- Even on the night before Jesus died there was strife among the disciples as to which of them was the greatest (Lk. 22:24).
- This is when Jesus girded Himself about with a towel and began to wash the feet of His disciples (Jn. 13:1 - 17). John said that on that night Jesus showed the disciples the full extent of His love (Jn. 13:1).
- **IT WAS ON THIS SAME NIGHT THAT JESUS SAID THAT HE WAS GIVING THEM A "NEW COMMAND". THEY WERE TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS HE LOVED THEM!**
- Jesus then continued that **ALL MEN WILL KNOW THAT YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES, IF YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER.**
- It was also on this night that Jesus promised to "go away" and then "send" them the Holy Spirit Who would empower them to love (Jn. 14:15 - 22).

Now let's review the facts.

- The disciples had heard true messages about love from Jesus for three years.
- Yet, the disciples still didn't love one another!
- **OBVIOUSLY THEY NEEDED HELP, AND THAT'S PRECISELY WHAT THE HOLY SPIRIT WAS TO DO. HE IS OUR HELPER!** Remember! The fruit of the Spirit is love (Gal. 5:22). When the Holy Spirit came these men were willed with the love of Jesus.
- By the power of the Holy Spirit they would have supernatural love. They would love one another "as Jesus loved them".
- By the power of the Holy Spirit the followers of Jesus, like Stephen, could pray for the men who were killing him, just like Jesus prayed for the men who were killing Him (Lk. 23:34, Acts 7:57 - 60).
- By the power of the Holy Spirit devout men from all over the world would be so united that they shared all of their possessions and there were no needy persons among them (Acts 4:32 - 35).

Since the disciples were unable to achieve this love on their own, Jesus commanded them to "wait for the gift" His Father had promised (Acts 1:4). This gift, as we have already pointed out, was the Holy Spirit. The primary purpose of the Holy Spirit was not to empower them to heal the sick, raise the dead, cure the lepers, or cast out demons. **THEY ALREADY HAD THAT POWER** (See Matt. 10:8). The primary purpose of the Holy Spirit was to empower them to love one another as Jesus loved them.

A LESSON FROM CORINTH

The church at Corinth was blessed with many spiritual gifts. In fact they did not lack any spiritual gift (1 Cor. 1:7). These spiritual gifts are listed in 1 Cor. 12:1 - 11). YET! IN SPITE OF ALL THESE SPIRITUAL GIFTS PAUL COULD NOT WRITE UNTO THEM AS SPIRITUAL PEOPLE.

“Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly-- mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?” (1 Cor 3:1-3)

Do you see it? The Corinthians were just like the apostles. Even though they could work miracles they were still filled with jealousy and quarreling. People filled with jealousy and quarreling do not reflect the Spirit of Jesus. In fact, because the Corinthians were so worldly and immature Paul had to feed them with milk and not meat.

Remember, all truths are equally true, but not all truths are equally important!. Your success in every area of life depends upon understanding this principle. We must do things in the order of their importance. Let us suppose that you come home and find that a bush is on fire and that your house is also on fire. Or perhaps you discover that your dog is sick, and your son is also sick. Or maybe you have to decide whether to protect your family from the hot sun or from a poisonous snake. In every circumstance of life wise people choose to do things in the order of their importance.

So Paul, guided by inspiration, informed the Corinthians about spiritual gifts but showed them a more excellent way (See 1 Cor. 13). The most important truth in Christianity, and also the most important truth in all the Bible is love. If you speak with the tongues of men and angels but do not have love, your ministry is only meaningless noise. If you have the gift of prophecy and enough faith to move mountains, but do not have love you are nothing. Obviously you cannot be saved without faith (Heb. 11:6). The Scriptures teach this truth in many other places as well. Love, however, is more important than faith. Nothing could be more clear. **“AND NOW THESE THREE REMAIN: FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE. BUT THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE” (1 Cor. 13:13)**

LOVE IS THE FULFILLING OF THE LAW

“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow-man has fulfilled the law.” (Rom 13:8)

Paul pointed out that love fulfills the law. The commandments to not commit adultery, not murder, not steal, not covet, etc. are all summed up in this one rule “love your neighbor as yourself” (Rom. 13:9). Love does no harm to its neighbor, therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.

He wrote the same thing to the Galatians: **“The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Gal 5:14).**

James wrote: **“If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor**

as yourself," you are doing right." (James 2:8)

Jesus said the same thing. Not only in our text of Matt. 22:35 - 40; Mk. 12:28 - 31, and Lk. 10:25 - 38, but also in other passages like Matt. 7:12: **"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."** (Matt 7:12)

**IF YOU MISS LOVE, YOU HAVE MISSED THE MOST IMPORTANT COMMANDMENT
IN THE LAW**

"But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." (1 Cor 12:31-13:13)

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