

## THE MOST EXCELLENT WAY

All truths are equally true, but not all truths are equally important!

Let us suppose that you come home and discover that your dog is sick, and your wife is sick. Both statements may be equally true, but they are not equally important.

2 plus 2 is 4, and Jesus is the Christ. Both statements are equally true, but they are not equally important.

Success in every area of life depends upon the ability to make the right decision and do things in the order of their importance. This principle is true for the leader of the home as well as the leader of the country. Certainly it is also important for Pastors and Teachers to make the right decisions and choose the very best way to get things done.

It is the purpose of this lesson, not just to help you choose a good way, but the very best way. The way that the Scriptures call the most excellent way (1 Cor. 12:31).

### THE CHURCH AT CORINTH

The church at Corinth had many problems. Here are a few that are mentioned in Scripture:

- They were divided over human leaders like Paul, Apollos, and Cephas (chapters 1 - 4).
- They had fornication in the church (chapter 5)
- They were taking their brethren to court before heathen judges (chapter 6).
- They had problems over marriage (chapter 7).
- They had problems over idolatry (chapter 8).
- Some of them denied that Paul was an apostle (chapter 9).
- They had problems over the Lord's Supper (chapter 11).
- They had problems over spiritual gifts (chapters 12 - 14).
- They had problems over the resurrection (chapter 15:12).

SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE VERY IMPORTANT, BUT PAUL WANTED TO SHOW THEM A MORE EXCELLENT WAY TO SOLVE THEIR PROBLEMS - THE MOST EXCELLENT WAY IS LOVE! PLEASE PRAYERFULLY READ 1 CORINTHIANS 12:31 - 13:13!

### LOVE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT TRUTH IN ALL THE BIBLE

The Jewish people had different denominations. Three of these Jewish denominations are mentioned in Matthew 22. (Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians) All of them were opposed to Jesus. All of them wanted to embarrass Jesus and divide His followers.

Therefore, when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they had an expert in the law ask Jesus: "**Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?**" There were 10 commandments written in stone, and over 600 other commandments in the writings of Moses. The Pharisees hoped that whatever Jesus said would polarize and divide His followers. Jesus, however, boldly transcended the thinking of Jewish denominations. He said:

**“‘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 22:37-40)**

The Bible contains 66 books, 1,189 chapters, 31,102 verses and Jesus reduced the total message of Scripture to only two commandments.

- (1) Love God
- (2) Love your neighbor
- (3) NOTE! THERE IS NO THIRD COMMANDMENT! Everything in the Law, and everything in the prophets, can be suspended on only these two commandments!

### ALL THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS HANG ON THESE TWO COMMANDMENTS

Bible teachers usually divide the history of the world into three dispensations:

- (1) The dispensation of the Patriarchs (rule by fathers).
- (2) The dispensation of Moses (rule by law).
- (3) The dispensation of Christ (salvation by grace).

On the surface it seems like God has changed. It seems like God commanded one thing in the days of the patriarchs, another in the days of Moses, and something else in the time of Christ. IN REALITY GOD HAS NOT CHANGED AT ALL! NOR HAVE HIS PLANS CHANGED. GOD HAS ALWAYS WANTED THE SAME THING. HE WANTS US TO LOVE HIM, AND TO ALSO LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR.

- The Scriptures teach in many places that God does not change. (See Malachi 3:6; Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; Hebrews 1:10 - 12; Hebrews 18:8; James 1:17; etc.)
- The Scriptures also teach in many places that God's plans have not changed. The Gospel reveals His eternal purpose which He had in mind before the world began. (See Romans 16:25 - 26; 1 Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 3:9 - 11; Colossians 1:26; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 1:2; 1 Peter 1:18 - 20; etc.)
- We therefore conclude that God has always wanted the same thing. Since before the foundation of the world God has wanted us to love Him, and to also love our neighbor. **“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.” (1 Jn 3:11-12)**
- God gave many commandments in the course of human history. The reason why he gave these commandments is to create love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith! (1 Timothy 1:5).

### THE SECOND COMMANDMENT IS THE MOST DIFFICULT

Cain was a religious man! He loved God and brought an offering to the Lord from the fruit that he had grown. THE PROBLEM WAS, THAT CAIN DID NOT LOVE HIS BROTHER! John wrote: **“This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain” (1 Jn 3:11-12)** The message of love is throughout all the Bible!

- Job was a perfect and an upright man, one who feared God and turned away from evil (Job. 1:8). Job not only loved God, but he also loved his neighbor. Job cared for the need, the sick, the blind, the dying, the widows and orphans (see Job. 29:11- 17).
- Isaiah criticized the people because they worshiped God, but didn't care for those in need like orphans and widows (see Is. 1:10 - 18; 58: 1 - 7).

- Hosea taught that God desires mercy more than sacrifice (Hos. 6:6). Sacrifice is what we give to God, and mercy is what we give to one another.
- Micah taught that humility and mercy were more important to God than offering thousands of rams and rivers of oil (Micah 6:6 - 8).
- Jesus taught that mercy is more important than tithing (Matt. 23:23).
- The parable of the Good Samaritan teaches that anyone who is in need is our brother (Lk. 10:25-37).
- When we stand before God in Judgement we will be rewarded if we have ministered to the hungry, the sick, the needy, and strangers (see Matt. 25:34 - 40).

### THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE

When Jesus died, His apostles had been with Him for three years. They had heard Him teach about love many times. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said: **“Do to others as you would have them do to you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners', expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”** (Luke 6:31-36)

Until the Holy Spirit came upon them, however, not only did the apostles not love their enemies, they didn't even love one another!

After three years of teaching about love the apostles got mad at one another (Matt. 20:24). They argued with one another about which of them was the greatest (Mark 9:34; Lk. 22:24). Jesus had to wash their feet to teach them humility (John 13:1 - 17).

- Yet, Jesus said, **“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”** (John 13:35)
- This could only happen with the help of the Holy Spirit. That's why Jesus told His disciples to wait for power from on high (Acts 1:4 - 8).
- When the Holy Spirit came there was a supernatural unity among believers - not one of them said that anything he possessed was his own, but they had all things common (Acts 4:32). This happened in spite of the fact that they were from different countries, spoke different languages, were from different Jewish denominations, and had different occupations and different ways of life.
- REMEMBER! THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE (GAL. 5:22).

### TEACHING ABOUT LOVE IN THE EPISTLES

(The word “love” is found dozens of times in the epistles - here are a few examples)

- Romans - love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:8 - 10).
- 1 Corinthians - love is the most excellent way and it never fails (1 Cor. 12:31 - 13:13).
- 2 Corinthians - it is the love of Christ that compels us (2 Cor. 5:17).
- Galatians - all the law is summed up in the commandment to love (Gal. 5:14).

- Ephesians - we are to walk in love as Christ loved us (Eph. 5:2).
- Philippians - Paul wanted our love to abound more and more in all knowledge and judgement (Phil. 1:9).
- Colossians - Paul had heard of the love which they had for all the saints (Col. 1:4).
- 1 Thess. - The Thessalonians were taught of God to love one another (1 Thess. 4:9).
- 2 Thess. - Paul prayed that the Lord would direct their hearts into the love of God (2 Thess. 3:5).
- 1 Timothy - The reason for God's commandments is love out of a pure heart (1 Tim. 1:5).
- 2 Timothy - God has not given us a spirit of fear - but of power and love (2 Tim. 1:7).
- Titus - Titus was encouraged to teach the older men to be sound in faith and love (Titus. 2:2).
- Philemon - Paul had heard of Philemon's love and faith (Philemon 5).
- Hebrews - We are to provoke one another unto love (Heb. 10:24).
- James - The Royal Law is to love your neighbor as yourself (Ja. 2:8).
- 1 Peter - We are to love one another with a pure heart fervently (1 Pet. 1:22).
- 2 Peter - We are to add love to brotherly kindness (2 Pet. 1:7).
- 1 John - We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren (1 John 3:14).
- 2 John - The commandment to love one another is something they had heard from the beginning (2 Jn. 1:5).
- 3 John - The brethren and strangers bore witness to the church about the love of Gaius (3 Jn. 1:6).
- Jude - Jude encouraged the brethren to keep themselves in the love of God (Jude 1:21).
- Revelation - The church at Ephesus was rebuked because they left their first love (Rev. 2:4).

LOVE IS THE MOST EXCELLENT WAY! IT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECT IN ALL THE BIBLE! PLEASE MAKE IT THE MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECT IN YOUR TEACHING AS WELL!

OUR LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF EVANGELISM

**“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)**

On Jan. 8, 1956 five missionaries were killed by Indians in the jungles of Ecuador. The martyrs were Nate Saint, Jim Elliott, Ed McCulley, Roger Youderian, and Pete Fleming. Nate Saint's sister, and Jim Elliott's widow, went into the jungle and won these people to Jesus Christ. Rachel Saint lived in the jungle with these people for 37 years. She died on Nov. 11, 1994, and is buried in the jungle near to the people whom she loved. Nate Saint's son, Steve Saint, was only 4 years old when his father was killed. One of the men who killed his father is an old warrior named Mincaye. Today, Steve Saint and Mincaye, are the best of friends. Steve's children call Mincaye "Grandfather", and their love for one another is a dramatic demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit to transform lives. MAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WORK THIS SAME MIRACLE IN EVERY LIFE!

Boyce Mouton  
103 Hodges  
Carl Junction, Mo. 64834