

## Love God, Love Neighbor

Manifesting Godly Love

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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The following songs appear in the annals of twentieth century popular music: “Love is Here to Stay,” was a popular song, and a jazz standard. George Gershwin composed it, and his brother Ira Gershwin wrote the lyrics. This song was written for the movie, *The Goldwyn Follies* in 1938. It also appears in the 1951 MGM Picture *An American in Paris*, and was the theme of the movie. “Love is Here to Stay,” was the last composition George Gershwin completed.

Another song was titled, “Love is a Many Splendored Thing,” the theme song to the 1955 movie of the same name. The group, The Four Aces, recorded the song. This song went to number one on the charts for four weeks, and it also won the Academy Award that year for best song. It was recorded several times by such musical luminaries as Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole, Connie Francis, and Neil Sedaka, among others.

There is “Love Makes the World Go Round,” which was a hit in 1961 when Bob Merrill wrote it as the main theme for the musical, *Carnival*. Over the last 50 years, Jane Morgan, the Everly Brothers, Ann Margaret, and Wayne Newton all liked it so much, they made recordings of it, too.

And of course, “All You Need is Love,” which might be the one that some of you know the best, is a 1960s anthem written by John Lennon, and performed by the Beatles. It was released in Britain in July 1967, and went straight to number one where it stayed for three weeks. But, in the United States, it appeared on the charts just a bit later, and was number one for a week only. It has been recorded more than a dozen times by various artists and groups since then, including The Fifth Dimension, Tears for Fears, Tom Jones, and Ferrante and Teicher.

The Troggs originally performed, “Love is All Around.” It was first released as a single in the United Kingdom in October 1967, and peaked at number five. The following May it reached number seven on the Billboard Hot 100 list in the United States. You may have heard it performed not by The Troggs, but by the group R.E.M. in 1991. Many of you who listened to the radio at that time probably heard it then, or perhaps, you heard Wet, Wet’s version that appeared in the movie, *Four Weddings and a Funeral* in 1994.

This song should not be confused with, “Love is in the Air,” which was a disco number from 1977.

And finally, “Love is the Answer,” which was written by the American singer-songwriter Todd Rundgren for his band’s 1977 album *Oops, Wrong Planet*. A better-known group, England Dan and John Ford Coley later popularized it in 1979, and they were able to take this hit to number 10 on the Billboard Adult Contemporary Chart. It has been recorded a few times since then as well.

Now, I know this seems silly to some of you, but you could not help but see the recurring theme in all of those songs. They were all very popular tunes in their time that expressed “Love is everything.” They glorified love to an extreme, almost. In most cases the love that is meant in the song is romantic love, l’amore, amore, and not the type of love we normally think of when we are in church. Hopefully, we are thinking a bit higher than that.

“All You Need is Love,” may be an exception. John Lennon, when later asked about the lyrics of his song, said, “Love is appreciation of other people and allowing them to be. Love is allowing somebody to be themselves, and that is what we do need.” Sounds like he was giving the lyrics of the song in his answer—in the rhythm so to speak. He had to put that extra syllable in there.

Now, I am not actually sure that the lyrics say that at all. I have read the lyrics to the song, “There’s nothing you can sing, that can’t be sung; nothing you could make that can’t be made; there’s nothing you can do that can’t be done.” To me, it sounds like he is saying, “You’re not so special. Whatever you can do, somebody else can do too.” But the song has been interpreted to infer brotherly love and even godly love. But, I am not so sure.

Whatever the case, these artists—poets, singer-songwriters—have clearly concluded that love is, indeed, the answer. It is the answer to all mankind’s ills. It is the answer to everything. You pose any problem, and love is what you need. Love is the answer, love is all around, love makes the world go round, love is a many splendored thing, love is here to stay.

Love, love, love. That is how that song starts. Love will solve all our problems. Love will empty our jails. Love will clean up our streets. Love will fill our bellies, pull down barriers, cure what ails us, bridge all chasms, line our pockets, purify our environment, work out all the kinks, and lead us to the golden age. All you need is love. It is that powerful. Love is the cure-all. Love is the universal antidote. All you need is love. Love is the answer.

Now, the sad thing is that these singers croon and warble about love without the slightest idea of what real love actually is. I gave you that quotation from John Lennon up above, and he had a kind of hazy definition of what love is—appreciation for other people, and allowing them to be as they are.

But that is not real definite. It does not come with any parameters. Just fuzzy. It comes from fuzzy thinking. There are no absolutes underneath it. It is just 'allow the other person to be,' and whatever he is, let him. Just, kind of, not care, or co-exist. Ever heard that before? That is an outgrowth of this fuzzy understanding of love. Just live with all of this. They are different, but that is okay. We can cover it with love, love, love. Appreciate them for what they are.

That is where this multiculturalism comes from. People are different all around the world. They have different cultures, different ideas, and different beliefs, but that is okay. Let them be. Allow them to live. Do not impose yourself on them. Co-exist. Appreciate them, and take from them what is good, or what you like, and it does not matter what it is, everybody else should let you be, too.

These people do not have the slightest idea of what real love actually is. They do not know where love comes from. It just is. And they certainly do not know how it works. All they do is co-exist.

When they are not thinking about romance, the best they can explain it, taking it down to its most ridiculous line, said by Rodney King, "Can't we all just get along?" You remember who Rodney King was? The man beaten up in Los Angeles.

It comes down to the way they think that if we all just gather around the fire, in our long hair and flower-clad clothes, and sing Kumbayah while we hold hands, while somebody plays an acoustic guitar, all of our enmities, differences, and prejudices will just magically go away. "Have a Coke, and a smile." Do you remember that commercial?

If we would all just get along, if we will just let everyone be, we could live in peace and harmony, and justice forever. Does that not sound wonderful? But, that is what these songs have trivialized love into. Certainly John Lennon's song has done that perhaps most of all.

Now, I have obviously painted a very simplistic, even caricatured version of this very liberal idea and concept of love. But truly, it is not very far off the mark. People out there have no idea what real love is. And so, they try to come at it from the depths of the modern philosophy of no authority, no absolutes—post modernism—and they come up

with this warm and fuzzy thing in which we just let everyone be.

Now, as God's called-out ones, however, we should have a far more mature understanding of real love—godly love. That is what real love is, God's love.

I do not intend to try to expound the full doctrine of love. That would take many sermons, and we do not have time for that. But I want to emphasize and make one big point through the sermon that is the vital unbreakable connection between the love of God, and the love toward neighbor; love for God, and love for neighbor. They are connected. They are not two separate things. We will see this as we go through.

Love for God and love for neighbor are very closely interconnected and it is this connection that explains why the love, love, love crowd out in the world cannot make it work right. They do not understand this connection between the love of God and the love of neighbor. All they think of is the love of neighbor, should they even think that deep. They totally leave out the love of God.

So, this is why they cannot make their feeble conception of love work. And, if I may be so bold, it is the reason why we in the church have often failed to make it work, because we have disconnected at times the love of God from the love of each other. And then, both suffer.

Let us go to the end of John 3 where we often do not go. We tend to go toward the beginning of this chapter, and maybe go to John 3:16, but not often to the other end. This is John the Baptist's conclusion to the discourse in the latter half of John 3.

**John 3:35** The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand.

We start here because I want to start as early in the process of love as we can get, and of all the statements in the Bible, this is about as early as it gets! Historically, this passage is during the lifetime of Christ on the earth, but what John the Baptist said is a reality that has happened since the depths of eternity past—the Father loves the Son. This is where it all begins. Perhaps we could have gone one step further back, and see in I John 4:8, and 16, where it simply says, "God is love." But, I did not want to go there because I did not want to start in the abstract. I wanted to start with the love of God being shown.

The point is that God's love was shown from one Being to the other—the Father to the Son. Of course, we know that the Son loves the Father. So we see them loving each

other, even when there was nothing else in the universe, when it was just themselves. The Father loved the Son. Or, we could say, God loved the Word. And, the Word just reciprocated that back to the Father. The point is that God's love would be meaningless without another being to express it toward. Love may exist in a vacuum, but it does not mean anything in a vacuum.

The Father loves the Son, and the Son loves the Father. This is where it all began, the mutual love. Or, as Mr. Armstrong most frequently put it, the outgoing concern of one to another. Here it is shown in the God Family and Mr. Armstrong's defining love as outgoing concern is important to my entire sermon. It is important to the whole concept of godly love, because the love that God has is expressed toward other beings. He does not bottle it up inside. He does not use it on Himself. It would be impossible for Him to do so. It is something that comes out of Him, and is expressed toward others.

I cannot stress too much the fact that *godly love exists best in a relationship*. You can have godly love when you are not in a relationship with another person, but it is not going to do much. It exists best in a relationship.

A being in isolation can love himself, and a certain amount of self-love is good and necessary to sustain life. If you did not love yourself, you would not feed yourself, and you would die. But, such love is frequently quite selfish. But with human nature in the mix, it usually does not end there. We often end up indulging ourselves, and it becomes very selfish. In the end, it is very empty. A person alone, indulging himself, in the end is very vain and futile. It is empty, and meaningless. Self-love, by definition, cannot be outgoing. Self love is entirely inward.

Now, it is from this idea that self love cannot be outgoing, we could argue that *the love God wants us to learn and practice does not truly exist in isolation*. He always expressed it toward the Son, and the Son toward Him. That is the same love that we are trying to emulate. And so, it is a love that is outgoing, as Mr. Armstrong always defined it—an outgoing concern.

In practical, effective terms, another being must always be the object of God's love. Of course, it all started with the love between those two God Beings. That is our example.

Now, God's plan that came next is an outworking of His love. That is how He works. Everything He does is in love. So, the design of this great master plan that He and the Word came up with was an outworking of His desire to share His love with many others—billions of other beings whom He would call His children, who He would adopt from among humanity. He would make them His sons. He and the Word put together

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this great master plan to bring humanity to the divine plane where they would enjoy, reciprocate, and express God's love forever.

Yes, I know that sounds a bit like the beatific vision, but this is a truth, that the love of God is the thing that He wants to expand throughout the universe among all the beings. That is what we are growing into. We will see this in a moment.

Because God is love, and we are being transformed into the image of His Son, we are being transformed into the love of God. It is very interesting.

So, this plan, this outworking of His love, resulted in the creation of the angels, and then the creation of all matter, and ultimately in the creation of Adam and Eve. Notice how the love of God expressed itself in outward acts.

His love first expressed itself in a plan with all the design and everything that went into the plan, and then it expressed itself in actual creation—the creation of angels as ministering spirits for God's people, and His personal servants in whatever He needed for them to do.

It then expressed itself in the creation of matter, because the human beings—the people—He wanted to become His sons and daughters had to be made up of flesh for His purposes. Those people, then, beings of matter, had to have other matter in order to exist. And so He created the planets, and the sun, moon, and stars; and all the physical creation on the earth out of love, because He was going to create these beings to have His love and reciprocate it back.

So, all these things were done out of an outworking of His love. And, they expressed themselves in actions—deeds.

Notice also, that in the creation account found in Genesis 1, God spoke, and these things were done. So we need to mention that *it started in words, but it expressed itself in deeds*. The words were there, and that is good, but it ended up being an actual work that was done, not just words spoken. This comes into play a bit later.

We also know that Adam sinned, and after him, all of his progeny sinned. No one, except Christ, has gone through life without sinning. So, to redeem mankind from his iniquity, the Lamb of God was slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8).

Think about this: The Bible says that Jesus Christ was slain in Judea in 31 AD. But, John (in Revelation 13) says that, no, in actuality, He was as good as dead already from

the foundation of the world. It was already determined that the One who was the Word would come to this earth, live as a man, and die for the sins of mankind. In fact, Peter even goes further than that, saying in I Peter 1:18-20 that before the foundation of the world, He was foreordained to be the sacrifice for sin. Peter takes it back even before the foundation of the world, which is generally thought to be the time of Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden. That is the time when this world was begun.

But now, this takes it back even further, that God knew from their earliest designs, perhaps back into those depths of eternity, that there would need to be a sacrifice for sin. And, the One who became Jesus Christ volunteered for it way, way, way back then. He has been living with this hanging over His head for who knows how many millennia.

So we can see from what we have gone through that from Their earliest designs, They were already manifesting Their love for the eventual children of God by designating the death of the Creator as the payment for human sin. It goes way back there. They did this, They planned this, They knew it had to happen, and so in Their love, They came up—designed—a just way to overcome sin, and pay for it.

You can see how this acts as a pre-Passover sermon as we hit these points.

**Ephesians 1:3-6** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ [a tremendous love—every spiritual blessing], [notice this] just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.

Paul said a mouthful. I will not get into his teaching, here, on predestination today. Alongside that, Paul is saying that, at the very least, we were predestined to be called from before that same foundation of the world; that God in His love, way before sin even appeared in mankind, set up the conditions and the process for this salvation—*back before Adam sinned*.

At the very least, He knew mankind would sin and need a Savior, and that He would then call individuals out of their sins, and give them the opportunity to become, as He says here, holy and without blame before Him in love. This whole process revolves around the love of God, and we will, at some point, if we have not already begun this, be

holy and without blame before Him in love.

Suffice it to say, though, we are not predestined to salvation or to condemnation, we are predestined to be given the *opportunity*. And, God is confident enough in His abilities and His love to bring the vast majority of us into His Family. It is God's will that we be in His Family, and when He sets His will to do something, He accomplishes it. But, we can still fail, and if we do, it will not be God's fault. It will be ours.

I want you to see all the ways that God is expressing His love toward us, and how His love toward us—us in particular—began so far back; and that He has been working in love all this while in the meantime to bring us into a loving relationship with Him, now, and to have an eternal loving relationship with Him in the Kingdom of God. All of these things revolve around His love for us.

**Romans 5:6-8** For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Notice that even in this act, being that we are here in the year AD 2011, and Christ died in 31AD, some 1,980 years ago, that we are already in the picture, and God is already showing us His love, because even though He died nearly 2,000 years ago, that sacrifice is still efficacious for our redemption. This is before any of us breathed one breath of air.

So, 2,000 years ago He had us in mind that He was willing to go to the stake/cross/tree and bleed out His life for us. He did that in His love to give us the covering for sin, the redemption from sin, justification, and entrance before the very throne of God by His blood. He was working out His love toward us at that time.

So, even before we ever committed one sin, before we took one breath, God was demonstrating His love toward us by sacrificing Himself for us to cover our sins, over which, as Paul writes, we had no power. As it says in verse 6, we were without strength. No human other than Jesus Christ had any power to overcome sin. There was no way, and no recourse that we could have to pay for our sins and live. We could pay for our own sins through death, but that would be it. We were without strength. We would just have to take the penalty, and it would be over. But God in His love provided us what we needed. He provided the Lamb for the sacrifice.

Now, the larger point is that God exhibited His love for humanity even in its most sinful, dirty, rotten, perverse, corrupt, ungodly state. We were in our sins, yet Christ died for us. Even before we ever gave one word of acceptance or belief, even before we made one step down the road to repentance, He was already willing to give Himself as the ultimate sacrifice.

In terms of outgoing concern, this is far and above what any good man would do for another. Yet Christ would have given His sinless life on the stake if only one man or woman had sinned. If it had only been Adam in the Garden of Eden who had sinned, and none of his progeny had ever followed that example, Christ still would have gone to Calvary.

On the other extreme, He gave His life to cover the sins of the most horrible, wicked sinner among us, if such a one believes, accepts His blood, and repents.

We may think of an example of the most horrible people that have ever lived, such as Hitler, Stalin, Mao, as well as Vlad the Impaler, or some serial killers on the loose in some neighborhood. Do you think God gave Himself for them? Yes He did, if they accept Him, and believe and repent—yes. Even as wicked as they are or were, that sacrifice would still cover them, too.

Who knows? We do not know if those will actually turn. They may be so perverted in their minds that they cannot. I do not know. That is not my call. But even so, this verse 8 covers even that. God demonstrates His own love toward us that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. So, the love of God is so profound that He is willing to encompass those kinds of people, and those depths of wickedness.

**Titus 3:4-7** But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

This is a bit further than Romans 5, but it says basically the same thing.

**I John 4:9-10** In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His

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Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

So, God's love was expressed to us from way far back. And it was expressed most vividly and maybe most effectively in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. In that one sacrifice, as Paul said in the book of Hebrews, "All sin was covered for all time."

Here, in this next passage, I want to draw this in closer and closer to us. Here, we take up from where we left off with Christ's sacrifice for sin and our acceptance of it.

**Romans 5:1-5** Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God [our wonderful future ahead of us]. And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope [the process of salvation, bringing us into the Kingdom of God, and into the image of Christ]. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

That last verse is very important. We can say that what we talked about before has been overarching and remote, but these five verses bring the love of God home to us in a very personal way. The love of God has not only been given to us in these great acts that have occurred down through history, but as it says in verse 5, the love of God has now been poured out abundantly into our hearts.

You could say that in the depths of time, and even in the historical event of Christ's death and sacrifice, the outworking of God's love were a little bit distant. But, when we are justified, and brought into God's Family by our calling and baptism, and the laying on of hands for the receipt of the Holy Spirit, then the love of God works not just with us, but is actually in us by His Spirit. It is the love of God, then, that begins to work to transform us from what we were into what God wants us to be.

So, rather than touching us from the outside, let us say, as these great acts from the past have done, God in His love is working with us from the inside now. In fact, this is where the love of God does its greatest work, because it changes us to become like Him from the inside out.

Remember as we read this next passage that the love of God is working on us from the

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inside out, from working on externals, to working on internals—how we are in our hearts.

**I John 4:14-16** And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God [which is very similar to Jesus' words in His Passover remarks]. And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. [And notice this,] God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

We can use this as a summary passage for what we have covered so far. God's love from eternity is a constant, and it is universal, while at the same time being very personal and intimate. In that unfathomable love for us, the Father and the Son prepared, planned, and sacrificed to make Jesus Christ our Savior. Once one acknowledges this and accepts this, God lives in us, and we live in Him. In the same way, we share with God His love through the Holy Spirit, and most importantly, if we let it, that presence transforms us into the image of His Son. It is so important that this love comes inside so that it can begin the work.

Notice what Paul says in a prayer for the people of God:

**Ephesians 3:14-21** For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you [notice the particulars] according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might [power for us] through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you [listen to this] being rooted and grounded in love may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

What did we just read here? The suggestion here—and I believe it is more than a mere suggestion—is that once we are rooted and grounded in God's love, once we have the basics and are rooted into His Family, we are grounded—firmly set and established. At this point we can begin to comprehend the length, depth, width, and height of the love of

Christ, specifically. And being able to comprehend the love of Christ to such a deep level it will ultimately produce the fullness of God in us. Do you understand that? I think it is incredibly profound! The central characteristic in all this is the love of God.

Once we are rooted and grounded in God's love, we can begin to understand the parameters of God's love. We can understand the depths of God's love; how broad it is, too; how wide it is; how it reaches out; is not bound by time or space. We can really understand how to use it to its greatest ability, how we can make use of it for the good of others.

Once we are in that mode, once we are in that frame of mind where we can make use of it, that is how the character of God will be produced within us, to the point where we become fully God.

Maybe this is simplifying things a little bit, but this is the way that Paul put it in this prayer. He asks that God would help the saints to have the strength to be rooted and grounded in God's love so that Christ may dwell in us, and that we may be able to comprehend it to its fullest degree, and then know the love of Christ that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

It is step by step that he is asking God to do all that He will *exceedingly abundantly*—more than we could ask or think—to bring us to the point where we are like God is God, expressing the love of God in this width, length, depth, and height fashion. That is the goal of our Christian life.

We started with the fact that God in His love expressed it from the very beginning to the Son. They wanted to express this to many others, and They wanted it to be expressed back to Them. So the whole design of the plan is to bring us to the point where this will ultimately, eternally happen. That is how we are all going to get along with each other—when we are all acting like God out of the love of God.

If we would go through I Corinthians 13, which we will not do today, we would see how central God's love is to the process of transformation. Have you ever looked at that passage in I Corinthians 13, and thought, "What other man besides Christ ever did these things?" Love is patient; love is kind, and so on. You know, we may have flashes of them when we do them every once in a while, "Hey! I was patient there for 15 seconds!" But, we do not express this love of God all the time, do we? We do not comprehend yet the length and depth, the breadth and the height. We are hit and miss. Of course, we always will be in this life, too. But God is bringing us to the point where He can change us and know that our character is set so that once we are spirit beings,

then we will do these things without flaw.

If we are doing those things found in I Corinthians 13 in a regular fashion, we will notice, and so will everyone else, that we are a totally changed person from the way that we were. That is what the love of God does. It changes people. It makes them like God. It produces the attributes of God, not the attributes of human nature.

However, and this is where things get sticky. There is always the tricky question of, "How?"

We see it in its greater principles that God through the Holy Spirit gives us His love—the indwelling of God in us—and that we are to use His Spirit to grow and become more like Him, but how? That is always the hard part. The practical part is always the hard part for us. God has *a/ways* done His part. He has done it from ancient eternity to this very second. And He will *a/ways* continue to be that way, too.

But, what is our part? It is not simply just to have His Spirit in us, because His Spirit in us is not going to do the work. It will *help* us do the work, but in order for the character of God to be built in us, we must put it into practice. Remember, another thing that Mr. Armstrong always taught us was that the character of God cannot be created by fiat. He just cannot say something, and behold, there is a perfect person. It does not happen that way. And so, He puts all the conditions into place, and He places His Spirit into us, and His Spirit is the love of God, but we must do something!

**Matthew 22:34-40** But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" [They expected something in which to get Him into trouble.] Jesus said to him, "You shall love the **LOORD** your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind [Deuteronomy 6:5].' This is the first and great commandment. "And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself [Leviticus 19:18. Christ quoted two very important Old Testament scriptures].' "On these **two** commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

This is very interesting. We tend to emphasize the first over the second. And this is fine. There is a good reason for that. Loving God must come first. It is the most important commandment. "This is the first and great commandment; it has priority." However, we should not let the priority given to the first become reason to neglect the second.

It has become a stock figure in literature, movies, and other art forms to portray a pious individual as so devoted to God, that he has not time or patience for his fellow man. He is like the Pharisees in a way. He is the religious figure—minister, priest, or rabbi—who has his nose stuck in the books so much that he cannot give any time to someone in the flock who might need him. When we get down to it, this sort of person really does not love God, if indeed that is really how he is. A person like this does not love God because God's love does not manifest itself like that. We have seen here that God put these two commandments together—love God, and love neighbor. “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Let us go on into chapter 23 where the context continues on, and He gives an example to the Pharisees of what He is talking about—people (Pharisees) who are doing this. They are trying to show a great amount of love toward God, but they are not showing any love toward their neighbor. So Christ points out a few instances.

**Matthew 23:4** "For they [the Pharisees] bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

Oh yes, they will make great pronouncements, “This is what you must do,” or “This is what God requires,” but they do not do them themselves. They find a way around them. They are tricky lawyers and scribes.

**Matthew 23:13-14** "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation."

They claimed to love God so much that they would teach all these things, bringing all these decisions out of love for Him, but it never worked out to any love toward their fellow man. In fact, Jesus says here that their pronouncements actually kept people from entering the Kingdom of God. Of course, they took advantage of the weak, too.

Their love did not extend to others. You can even say that their love toward God was perverse. Therefore, it really was not the love of God at all.

Now, I want you to see how the apostle John emphasizes the second commandment (Matthew 23) in his epistle. I am sure that you have read through I John several times since coming to the truth, but it is an amazing thing that this principle keeps coming up time and time again. We are going to hit the highlights here in the middle of his epistle. Here, John is showing a difference between the children of God, and the children of the Devil. But, we can even say this is the difference between God's people and worldly people like the Pharisees.

**I John 3:10-19** In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest [made clear and distinct]: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death [mighty strong words!]. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us [that is the example]. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need [he is giving us an example of how we can do this], and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? [Obviously, we should help.] My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.

**I John 3:23** And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment [that is the second mention that we have this commandment to love one another].

**I John 4:7-8** Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

**I John 4:11** Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

**I John 4:20-5:3** If someone says, "I love God [having proclaimed these

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words]," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment [yet another mention] we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

Wow. John goes around and around and around some more; love of God; love of brother; keep the commandments. He hits us from whichever angle he can think of. All of these things are different facets of the same thing. He is trying in these several different ways to come up with the phrasing so that we can understand what Christ was getting at during the Passover service when He said, "Love one another," and "By this all men will know you are My disciples if you love one another."

The apostle John is showing us, here, how these three facets work together. If we love God, we will love our neighbor, and keep the commandments. If we love our neighbor, we are showing love to God and fulfilling the commandments. If we keep the commandments, we are proving that we really love God, and we love our neighbor.

See how it just goes around and around? However you look at it, if you are loving God, you will love your neighbor, and you will keep the commandments. If are loving your neighbor, you are showing that you love God and are keeping the commandments. If we are keeping the commandments, we obviously are showing that we love God because we want to obey Him, we want to please Him. And, the doing of the commandments works out to love our neighbor.

Remember that in Matthew 22:40, Jesus said that the law and the prophets hang from love toward God and love toward neighbor. That is what John is saying here. These are two foundational tenets of God's way of life—love God, love neighbor—and, every principle and precept that God teaches hangs from these two. This is obviously how we can say that the Ten Commandments can be divided up into the first four—loving God—and the last six—love toward fellow man. So we see it right in the Ten Commandments.

The law hangs from these two major precepts—major foundational principles—love toward God, love toward neighbor. Then, every other commandment falls under them

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one way or the other. Either we are showing love toward God or showing love toward neighbor. And so, keeping the Ten Commandments is showing love either to God or neighbor.

All three are facets of the same thing. They are linked together. They are inseparable. They work together.

We find it right in the Sermon on the Mount, too.

**Matthew 5:43-48** "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Notice how Jesus' very early teaching found in Matthew equates the love we show our neighbors, even our enemies, with the love of God. He says, here, that our love for our neighbor or enemy is an imitation of God's love. He also reminds them that God sends the sun and the rain on the just and the unjust. He does the same things. Our love for neighbor is supposed to imitate what God does Himself. His love is for everyone.

Our love should imitate that and be for everyone also. We are not just supposed to be chummy with just the people that love us. We are not supposed to just greet our brethren, but not greet anyone else, because that is not the example that has been given to us from God the Father. God the Father is loving toward everyone.

Also, notice how He ends this passage. He gives an admonition to become perfect like God is perfect. This is a huge hint that we make progress toward spiritual perfection—real growth in righteous character—when we grow in the selfless, impartial, outgoing concern for others like God does. If we are imitating that, we are growing toward perfection.

Do you see the connections? The love that we show toward others is a gauge of our love toward God.

**Matthew 25:31** "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.

"Okay, this is the scene of judgment—My judgment over all people. And, these are the criteria by which I will judge."

**Matthew 25:32-34** All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand [the sheep], 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

This phrase comes back in. God's love has prepared this Kingdom from the beginning.

**Matthew 25:35-40** 'For I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous [now He calls the sheep righteous—saints who have grown in righteous character] will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you [this statement always means a pronouncement of supreme significance], inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

This is that blatant declaration that the love we show our brethren is a gauge of how much we love God, because if we love our brethren, then we love Christ.

So, how do we treat each other? This is the question.

We can say that we love God and praise Him to the rooftops; we can sing, or perform on an instrument; we can shout "Glory, Hallelujahs" by the dozens, but all that is mostly just words that are easy to say.

We can even say them when we do not even mean them. Many thousands, even

multitudes of hypocrites, have called themselves “Christian” down through the centuries. But feeding, clothing, visiting, caring for, being hospitable to, helping, praying for, encouraging, and plain old just-getting-along-with-our-brethren is not so easy to fake.

As the apostle James says, “It does no good say to someone who needs your help, ‘Be warm and filled.’” That does not help at all. And if we are actually showing the love by doing things for people and helping them by actually making efforts, by sacrificing ourselves, by giving of our time for one another, that shows love. It manifests love. And if we are doing it to them, then we are doing it to Christ.

Practicing real godly love for our brethren manifests, reveals, exposes, exhibits how much we love God. We can say we love God, but when we display love for the brethren, then the depth of our love for God is there for everyone to see. Even though no one else may notice—just as Christ told us to do our alms in secret—perhaps, as mentioned in Matthew 25, we do not even notice we are doing this sometimes—God does notice. And in doing so, we successfully pass the bar of judgment.

I recommend that you go through all of the book of I John before the Passover and think about these things.

**I John 4:12** No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.

Take out that middle phrase for a moment, and see how that reads: “If we love one another, His love has been perfected in us.”

Remember, in Matthew 5:48, “Be you perfect just as your Father in heaven is perfect”? That perfection comes by showing love for one another.

Do we want that perfect love of God? Do we want to reflect the perfect character of the Father and Christ? Then you practice and perfect loving the brethren. It is just that simple. It is that difficult.

We should start with our closest brethren—our spouses and children—then work outward from there. This is because these are the ones you see the most, and those are the ones who are going to be the gauges God is going to look at to see how much we love Him. But, it is what we must be concentrating on, really focusing on, in preparation for entering His Kingdom.