

The Fulfillment of the Two Greatest Commandments

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...Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets—Matthew 22:37-40

Of The Love Of God And Our Neighbor

*Now the end of the commandment is love,
out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned — 1 Timothy 1: 5*

IN this verse, the apostle sets before us love, the highest and noblest virtue; and acquaints us at the same time, with four particulars concerning it. *First*, that Love is the summary of all the commandments: for "love," says the apostle, "is **the fulfilling of the law**" (Rom. 13: 10); in which all the precepts are comprehended, and without which, all gifts and virtues are unprofitable and fruitless.

2. What he says in the *second* place, namely, that love must arise from a **pure heart**, relates to the love of God, which requires a heart void of worldly love and affection, according to that saying of St. John: "**Love not the world. neither the things that are in the world. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.**" (1 John 2: 15-17). Whosoever, therefore, has a heart purified from all love to the creature, so as to depend or acquiesce in no transient good whatsoever, can cleave most intimately to God, saying with David, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever" (Psal. 73: 25, 26). The love of such a one, proceeds out of a "*pure heart.*" Of the same character also, is that love which is attended with great delight, pleasure and joy in God; of which we have an illustration in David: "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower" (Psal. 18:1, 2).

3. The apostle, in the *third* place, teaches us, that love must be "**out of a good conscience.**" This properly concerns the love of *our neighbor*, who is to be loved, not for the sake of interest or worldly advantage (which would be a false love out of a bad conscience); but for the sake of God only, and of his commandments. Nor ought we to afflict our neighbor either by word or deed, either secretly or openly; nor on any account, bear envy, wrath, hatred, malice or rancor against him; that so our conscience may not accuse us when we address ourselves in prayer to God Almighty.

4. The fourth requisite of Love is, a "**faith unfeigned;**" so that nothing be done that is contrary to the rule of faith, and to our Christian profession, and that God be not denied publicly or privately, in prosperity or adversity. This is the substance of what is contained in that sentence of the apostle. We shall now speak more particularly, with respect to each of the several parts.

5. In the *fifth* place, then, *Love*, according to the apostle, "**is the end of the commandment;**" for that love which arises from a pure faith, is the noblest among the fruits and effects of faith; than which a man can do nothing better or more acceptable to God. For God does not require at our hands great and difficult enterprises, no high performances that exceed our capacities; but he has changed the yoke of the Old Testament service, and its many commandments and ordinances into faith and love, and has given us for this end the Holy Ghost, who, "shedding abroad in our hearts the love of God" (Rom. 5:5), renders everything sweet and easy, and proves the original spring of this heavenly virtue.

6. **Love, therefore, is not a hard work**, a labor attended with toil and difficulty; on the contrary, it makes everything easy to a good man. "His commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3), that is to say, they are not so to an enlightened Christian; for wherever the Spirit of God comes, he creates a free, willing and ready heart in the discharge of Christian virtues. Nor does God require of his children great skill or learning: it is only love which he regards. If this be sincere and fervent, free from disguise and dissimulation, God takes more pleasure and delight in it, than in all the knowledge and wisdom, in all the art and talent that any man upon earth, in his best works, can possibly exhibit. Wherever this divine love is wanting, there all wisdom and knowledge, all works and gifts, are

altogether unprofitable. They are accounted vain and dead, as a mere body without life (1 Cor. 13: 1, 2).

7. As for human learning and great abilities, they are common to heathens as well as to Christians; and great actions are performed as well by infidels as by believers. **It is love only which proves the sure test of a sound Christian, distinguishing between the false and the true.** For wherever love is wanting, there can be no good thing, however it may claim the admiration of men by its specious appearances. The reason is, because God is not there; for "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him" (1 John 4: 16).

8. **Love is also pleasant**, not only to God who gives it, but also to man, who exercises it: whereas, all arts and sciences, all the knowledge and wisdom which man grasps, are not attained but with great labor and study, with much care and application, and even at the expense of bodily health. But this heaven-born love cheers both the body and the mind. It invigorates the spirits, confers new strength, and wonderfully improves and exalts the mind. Nor is it attended with any loss whatever, but on the contrary, produces many good and noble effects in the soul. Love is itself the reward of the lover, and virtue always carries its own recompense with it: as, on the contrary, the vicious man is punished by his own excesses, and vice is the constant tormentor of him that commits it.

9. Again, when the other faculties of the body and mind are faint and wearied, love faints not. **Love is never weary, never ceases.** Prophecy may pass away, tongues may cease, and sciences may be destroyed; arts may be lost, the knowledge of mysteries may vanish; yea, faith itself at last may fail also: but yet "love never faileth," nor can fail: for when all that is imperfect is happily removed, then love alone abides forever, and attains its full perfection (1 Cor. 13: 8).

10. To render anything pleasing to Almighty God, it is necessary that it proceed from him; since he approves of nothing but what he himself works in us. Now, God is love; it therefore follows, that all that we do ought to proceed from a divine faith, in order that it may be pleasing to God; and from pure love, that it may prove profitable to men. **This love must be pure, without any regard to self-honor, self-interest, and those mean designs which sometimes intrude into a Christian's actions.** In like manner our *prayers* should spring from a principle of love, that they may have the more ready admittance to the God of love. Consider, therefore, how can man's prayer be acceptable to God, who is full of wrath and rancor, hatred and malice? Were such a one to repeat the whole Psalter every day, it would be but an abomination before the Lord. True worship consists in spirit (John 4: 23, 24), in faith, in love, not in a long recital of words. Remember the example of Christ, who, from a merciful heart, cried, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23: 34). A man that does not love God, is also unwilling to pour out his heart in prayer and supplication: but to him who is affected with a sense of divine love, the duty of prayer is easy and delightful. A man that has a cordial love to God, readily serves him; but he that is void of this love, does not serve him at all, though he may submit to much toil and drudgery, and even heap one mountain upon another.

11. Upon the whole, then, nothing is more agreeable to human nature, nothing better and more profitable, than this divine love, which, therefore, should be stirred up in the heart of man, and when once raised into a flame, should be carefully preserved from being ever quenched.

12. **Faith should work all things in a Christian through love;** and love should be the agent of faith, as the body is the agent of the soul. The soul sees and hears, speaks and acts, through the body, to which she is united; so, O man! should the love of God, springing from faith, do all things in and through thee. Whether thou eat or drink, hear or speak, commend or reprove, let all be done *in love*, after the example of Christ, in whom resided nothing but pure love. If thou beholdest thy neighbor, behold him with the eyes of a compassionate friend; if thou hearest him, hear him with love and tenderness; and if thou speakest with him, let thy speech be seasoned with love and Christian affection.

13. Carefully preserve the root of Christian love by faith, in order that nothing but that which is good may grow up in thy heart, and issue thence, as from its genuine centre (1 Cor. 16:14). Thou shalt then be enabled to fulfill the commandments of God; since they are all comprehended in love. Hence, a holy man has expressed himself after this manner: "O love of God in the Holy Ghost! thou art the highest joy of souls, and the only divine life of men. Whosoever enjoys not thee, is dead even while he lives; and whosoever possesses thee, never dies in the sight of God. Where thou art not, there the life of men is a continual death; but where thou art, there life is made a foretaste of eternal happiness." Whence it appears that this divine love is the sum and fulfilling of all the commandments of God.

14. We consider now, that our love to God ought to proceed "out of a pure heart." **The heart of a man who is desirous to love God, ought first to be cleansed from all worldly love and attachment to the creature.** It is

then that God becomes the chief and sovereign Good to the soul. She can then say, "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance, and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot" (Ps. 16: 5). "The Lord knoweth the days of the upright," that is, those that love him out of a disinterested heart; "and their inheritance shall be forever" (Ps. 37: 18). "Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart" (Ps. 37:4). **In a word, God is the only fountain whence all our joy ought constantly to spring.**

15. God, therefore, should be the most beloved object of our souls, and our hearts should rest in him alone, because he is the highest good. He is nothing else than mercy and goodness, love and kindness, clemency and patience, truth, comfort, peace, joy, life, and happiness. All this he has laid up in Jesus Christ. Whoever, therefore, has Christ, is thereby put into the possession of all these heavenly virtues. And whoever loves God, must also of necessity love God's truth and mercy, his goodness and kindness, and the whole train of divine virtues.

16. For, a true lover of God has a love to all that God loves, and an aversion to all that God hates. If any man loves God, he must love truth, mercy, and righteousness, because God is all this himself. He must also delight in humility and meekness, since thereby he is rendered conformable to that meekness and lowly-mindedness which resided in Jesus. On the other hand, a true lover of God cannot but abhor all ungodliness, with all the works of iniquity; because all manner of impiety is enmity against God, and is the work of the devil himself. A lover of God hates a lie, because the devil is the father of lies, and was a liar from the beginning. And this is the reason that every one who loves lies, injustice, and other vicious workings of nature, must needs, in that sense, be the offspring of the devil (see John 8:44); and again, whoever loves Christ, his Lord and Saviour, loves also the example of his pure and holy life, his humility and meekness, his patience, and the other heavenly virtues that appeared in his conduct. And such a one must of necessity be adopted into the number of the children of God.

17. This love, proceeding out of a "pure heart," must be obtained from God by prayer and supplication. And truly, **God is willing to enkindle in us this heavenly flame through the love of Christ, if He be but earnestly solicited, and if the heart be every day and every moment laid open to his divine influence.** If thy love should grow cold and weak at any time, arouse thy heart, faint not, but stir up the grace of God within thee, and be not too much discouraged at it. In the name of God arise again, set to work, and renew the acts of thy first love. As thou art sensible of thy coldness in love, thou mayest be assured from that circumstance, that the eternal light of divine love is not *wholly* extinguished, although it be eclipsed, and at present give but little heat. Doubt not that thy Saviour will enlighten thee again, and fire thy heart with his love; so that thou mayest sit once more under his shadow, and rejoice in the light of his countenance. At the same time be earnest in prayer and supplications, lest hereafter the flame of this heavenly love should be again deadened in thy heart. Such is love "out of a pure heart," unmixed with love of the world.

18. Let us now consider, Love, as arising from a "good conscience: and as it respects our neighbor. **The love of God and the love of our neighbor are so closely united, that they can never be separated. The true touchstone of our love to God, is the love which we bear to our neighbor.**" If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God, love his brother also" (1 John 4: 20, 21). For the love of God cannot dwell in a man who is filled with hatred or malice, or divested of all bowels of love and compassion. If thou hast no pity on thy brother, who stands in need of thy help, how canst thou love God, who needs not anything that is thine, and has commanded thee to express thy love towards him, by bestowing marks of it upon thy brother?

19. As faith unites to God, so love unites to our neighbor; and as a man is made up of body and soul, so faith and love (that is, the love both of God and of our neighbor) make up a true Christian. Thus he that "dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God" (1 John 4:16). And since God effectually desires the good of all men, it follows, that he who loves in like manner is of one heart with God; and that he who is otherwise affected is against God, and has not the mind of the Lord, but is the enemy of God as well as of his neighbor. He is, unquestionably, an adversary to God who is an enemy to men.

20. It is the property of this love to bewail and compassionate the infirmities of others (Gal. 6:1). Indeed, the failings and weaknesses of our fellow-creatures represent to us, as in a mirror, our own imperfections, and remind us of the various defects that encumber our nature. Therefore, when thou seest another overtaken in a fault, consider that thou also thyself art but a man; and learn from thy own infirmities, to bear those of others with patience, meekness, and humility (Rom. 15: 7).

21. Such especially as sin, not from malice or determined wickedness, but who are surprised into a fault by

weakness and inadvertency; and who, coming soon to themselves again, repent of that which they have done, and firmly resolve to watch the more against the snares of Satan for the future; such souls as these are surely to be pitied and assisted. He that does otherwise, shows that he has nothing in him of the merciful and forbearing spirit of Christ. When a man hastily condemns the faults of his neighbor, without feeling any love or compassion, it is an evident sign that he is altogether void of God, and of his merciful spirit. On the contrary, a true Christian, being anointed with the spirit of Christ, treats all men as one that has a fellow-feeling with them, and bears with them in a sympathizing Christian love and tenderness, according to the example of Christ, which he has left us to follow.

Therefore, if any man, upon serious search into his inward condition, finds that he has not the love of his neighbor abiding in him, let him know, assuredly, that the love of God remains not in his soul, and that he himself is without God. This should strike him with horror and indignation against himself; it should influence him the more speedily (after repenting of his sin from the bottom of his heart) to reconcile himself to his neighbor, that, in this order, the love of God may also return to him again. Then all his actions, while he continues in this love and faith, are good, holy, and divine; and this love, dwelling in his heart, will actuate him freely and willingly to embrace all men, and with great affection and joy to do them all manner of kindnesses; so that he will "rejoice over them to do them good," even as God himself (Jer. 32:41).

22. Without this love, whatever is in man, is diabolical and altogether evil. Nor is there, indeed, any other cause why the devil can do no good, but because he is utterly destitute of love both towards God and man. Hence, all which he does is radically evil, and deprived of all intrinsic goodness. In all that he sets about, he designs nothing but God's dishonor, and man's destruction. He cunningly contrives ways to vent his enmity both upon God and man; and, therefore, he seeks for such hearts as he can fill with spite and envy, and then discharges through them his malice and wrath. "And hereby it is manifest who are the children of God, and the children of the devil" (1 John 3:10).

23. Therefore, love must be "out of faith unfeigned," that is, we must love God equally in prosperity and adversity. Whoever loves God sincerely, accepts with joy all the dispensations of his Providence, after the example of Christ; who, with a cheerful and ready mind, took up the cross, which he knew that the will of his Father imposed on him. "I have," says he, "a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened (and in pain) till it be accomplished!" (Luke 12:50). In the same manner have all the holy martyrs carried with joy their cross after him.

24. To those that unfeignedly love God, the cross, which Christ enjoins us to bear, does not prove grievous or burdensome; and this for no other reason, than because it is the *yoke of Christ* (Matt. 11: 29). If the magnet attracts the heavy iron, why should not that heavenly loadstone, the love of God, attract the burden of our cross, and render it light and agreeable; especially after the heart is affected with a touch of the divine love? If the sugar sweeten such herbs as are bitter by nature, why should not the sweetness of the love of God make that pleasant and easy, which to the flesh is nothing but a cross and affliction? And truly it was from the fulness of this love, that the blessed martyrs bore the most exquisite pain with patience and joy; being transported with it to such a degree, as to be almost insensible of their very torments.

The Love Of Our Neighbor, More Particularly Considered

Of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.—2 Peter 2:19

THERE is no bondage more hard and grievous, than to be under the yoke of the passions: but of all these, none is so cruel as *hatred*, which so weakens and depresses all the powers both of body and mind, as not to leave to the man one free thought. On the contrary, **he who lives in love is free.** He is no slave to anger, envy, covetousness, pride, lying, or calumny; and being delivered from these by love, he suffers not himself to be subdued by evil desires, but continues Christ's freeman (1 Cor. 7: 22) in the liberty of the Spirit: for "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3: 17). Whosoever, therefore, walks in the love of Christ, is no longer a slave to sin, or a servant to carnal affections; for the Spirit of God's love has freed and purified him from carnal concupiscence. And we see that the love of God extends over all men; of which we not only find sufficient proofs in Scripture, but the footsteps of his universal benignity are also everywhere displayed in nature. We are all equally covered with the heavens, and have all the use of the sun, the air, the earth, and the water; as well they who are of high degree, as they who are of the meanest condition. And the very same mind that is in God towards us, ought also to be in us towards men; God himself having set us a pattern of universal kindness for our imitation. He regards not one more than another, but loves all with an equal affection. With him there is no respect of persons, of dignity, or merit; but he beholds all alike in Christ. This is for our instruction. Now, as God acts towards us, so ought we to act towards our neighbor. And truly, after the same manner as we deal with man, so God will deal with us again. We need not go far to inquire what favor we have with God Almighty. If we but enter into our own conscience, it will impartially tell us, what mind and affection we bear to our neighbor; and as we have done to him, so will God certainly do to us again, and return our works into our own bosom. And in this sense it is said of God, that "with the pure he shows himself pure; and with the froward, shews himself froward" (Ps. 18:26); that is, if thou bearest an evil mind to thy

neighbor, God will be thine adversary also.

2. Since, therefore, God has no need of our service, he has substituted our neighbor in his place, to receive our love, and has commanded us to pay it as to himself. **He has made this love of our neighbor the very touchstone by which we are to examine the sincerity of our love to God.**

3. And it is for this reason that he has enjoined the love of our neighbor with so great earnestness, requiring us to show constantly the same love to him which God shows to us. For unless a man be fully reconciled to, and be in perfect love with his neighbor, he cannot have the favor or grace of God. And although all the sins of the world are atoned for by the death of Christ, and a full pardon obtained, yet all mankind may in some sense be said to be in the same circumstances with the servant in the parable, who had not wherewithal to pay; the king freely remitted him all his debts: but when he afterwards behaved himself cruelly towards his fellow-servant, the king revoked his pardon, and condemned the servant, on account of the hard usage with which he treated his neighbor (Matt. 18: 23, etc.). This parable Christ concludes with the remarkable expression: "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother, their trespasses." Verse 35. And, "With the same measure that ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again" (Luke 6: 38).

4. Hence, it plainly appears, that man was not created for himself alone, but for his neighbor's sake also. So strict is the commandment of loving our neighbor, that when it is broken, the very end of our creation is destroyed, and the love of God is immediately withdrawn from the soul. Nothing is left but the severest justice, judging and condemning all that are void of this love.

5. If we duly considered these things, we should never be angry with one another; neither would "the sun ever go down upon our wrath" (Eph. 4: 26). It is true, on the one hand, that Christ by his death on the cross has offered a full and complete atonement for all our trespasses, and in this respect, has remitted all our sins at once; yet it is, on the other hand, an awful consideration, that the whole extent of the merits of Christ will be of no avail at all to us, if we continue to hate our brother, and will neither pardon nor love him. We shall be entirely cut off from all the benefits that flow from the atonement. [The Scriptures are filled with this truth. Here are a few to show that Matthew 18:35 does not stand alone. Matthew 6:14, 15: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (See also 1 John 3:14, 15; Heb. 6:4-6; 2 Pet. 2:20-22)].

6. Hence it appears how important the love of our neighbor must be in the sight of God, binding us even to such a degree, that God refuses to be loved by us, unless we love our neighbor also; so that if we fail in our benevolence toward the latter, we fall at the same time away from that grace that bringeth salvation and divine love that draws us to Christ. And for this reason, we were created all equal and of the same nature, that we might not despise one other; but, like children of one common parent, live in peace and love, and endeavor to maintain a good and serene conscience.

7. Now, whoever hates and despises his brother, hates and despises God also, who has forbidden all such animosities in the severest terms. If thou contemnest thy brother, God also contemns thee; which hastens thy judgment and condemnation, and deprives thee of all interest in the merit and redemption of Christ, by which sin is forgiven.

8. For it cannot be possible that a heart filled with wrath and bitterness, should in any degree reap a saving fruit from the blood of Christ, which was shed from a motive of pure love. Yea, the above parable (Matt. 18: 35) plainly convinces us, that God "was less offended at the debt of ten thousand talents, than at the barbarous cruelty of which the servant was guilty; he can overlook the debt, but he cannot overlook the want of love. Let us, therefore, ponder the words with which the Lord concludes the parable: "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you."

9. But we must keep before us that an unfeigned love of the brethren is not grounded on any work of ours, but only on the merits of Christ applied to us by faith. From this righteousness of Christ, apprehended by faith, springs love to our neighbor, together with the whole train of Christian virtues, called by the apostle "fruits of righteousness, which are to the glory and praise of God" (Phil. 1:11).

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