

## Love Thy Neighbor (Part 1)

Loving Your Neighbor

John W. Ritenbaugh

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We are going to begin this sermon by turning to Mark 12.

**Mark 12:28** Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?"

"First" here means "in the sense of *foremost*." Which is the *foremost* commandment of all, or the most *important* commandment of all?"

**Mark 12:29-34** Jesus answered him, "The first [or the foremost] of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." So the scribe said to Him, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." But after that no one dared question Him.

This episode during Jesus' ministry seems to appear also in Matthew 22 and in Luke 10. They all on the surface appear to be the same incident, but each contains slight differences so that when they are all combined we get a more detailed picture and can see that they are *not* the same. For example, Matthew informs us that he was a Pharisee, and Matthew and Luke both call

the questioner a lawyer, whereas Mark refers to him as a scribe. The difference is that Matthew and Mark have Jesus being asked the question, but Luke portrays Jesus as asking the question Himself.

What appears to me is that Matthew and Mark record the same incident, where the record in Luke is an entirely separate one. Now when Jesus replied in Matthew and Mark, He said, "The second is like." In Luke's account, the lawyer's reply is serious in that he joins the two commandments as though they are one. Very interesting. We did not get to Luke yet, but we are going to turn there now.

**Luke 10:25-28** And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" So he answered and said, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.'" And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live."

In all three cases the law quoted is definitely from different areas of the Scriptures. Let us take a look at them so we can refresh our minds as to exactly where they appear. The one is in Deuteronomy 6.

**Deuteronomy 6:4-5** "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

The other one, though, appears in Leviticus 19.

**Leviticus 19:18** You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

It is Jesus who gives the more explicit answer. However, even Jesus' answer provides some support for the lawyer. In both Matthew's and Mark's account, the Greek term translated into the English word "like" is *homoios*, which *Thayers Greek-English Lexicon* defines as: "corresponding to, or equivalent

to the same as in authority." This is very interesting, because it is very easy for us to say that the one—"You shall love the LORD your God"—is more important than the other—"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Now we can begin to see that the separation, the distinction, is there, because even Jesus said the *foremost* is more important. But on the other hand, they are so close together it is possible—it would do us well—to think of them as being one.

That incidentally is pretty much what this sermon is going to be about. When we conclude, I will read you a couple of scriptures which are very interesting in this regard. So the gap between the two, though it exists, is not near as wide as it might appear on the surface.

These two major principles are very brief summaries of the intent of the entire law. Everything is covered in principle by these two commandments, but, as we continue, we shall see that the Pharisaic doctor of the law—the one called the lawyer—was right on target when he made his reply. This is why Jesus said to him, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God."

Now, how can it be that the Pharisee was so close in his understanding of these two commandments? It is because one cannot love God without loving man, and one cannot love man without loving God. They go together. They cannot be separated. So, one cannot ignore one command by totally concentrating on the other. Doing so would break the other part of his responsibilities, and he would therefore be keeping neither. Remember, James said that if you break one commandment, you have broken them all, so the only sensible conclusion then is that the two of them must be considered together as a whole.

We are going to go back to Luke 10 again.

**Luke 10:25** And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

Notice that the lawyer's intent was to *test* Jesus.

**Luke 10:29** But he [the lawyer], wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

This then begins the Parable of the Good Samaritan. We are going to go to the end of that parable. Again the lawyer is speaking. He is responding to Jesus' question.

**Luke 10:37** And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

So the lawyer answered Jesus' question correctly. It is interesting though (and this is just an aside), that something stuck in this man's craw, and Jesus discerned it. The lawyer did not like the idea that the Samaritan was the one who showed the mercy. The priest and the Levite, who were fellow Israelites, passed him right by, but the Samaritan showed him mercy. The Samaritan, who was not even of what they considered to be of the true faith, was the one who showed mercy, and was compassionate, and *had* to be considered the neighbor. It is also interesting to note that the lawyer apparently could not bring himself to say, "the Samaritan." He simply said, "He who showed mercy on him."

I think that we can make a fairly logical and at least a careful assumption here, that even though the lawyer knew the words of the command, he did not follow it in actual practice. This, brethren, I believe is a very easy trap for people to fall into these days. There is a drive in people at this time that I cannot remember experiencing back in the 60s, 70s, and 80s, but it is in the church now, a large number of people who want to be technically correct in terms of doctrine so that they can be assured in their own mind that *their* relationship with God has good footing. But it is entirely possible that even that good understanding does not issue into good works in relation to men.

Believe me, I am dealing with this every day in questions people ask of me. Most of these questions do not come from church members, but I do know that there is some of this issue among church members. I am not talking

about the Church of the Great God necessarily. I mean people writing in and asking questions, and say they *are* members of the church of God. But do you know what? They are not fellowshiping with anybody.

Somehow, it is not issuing forth that way. They are very careful, and they will put up stern arguments against what they feel might be wrong with us, or with Living, or with United, or with Christian Biblical. You name it. But they feel they are part of the church of God. Something is missing there.

Now regarding the lawyer in Luke 10, if it were not true that something was stuck in his craw about being a neighbor, why would there be any reason for what John wrote here, that "he, wanting to *justify* himself," and said to Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" He was building a case in his own mind. I think what might have happened here is that his reservation about who was his neighbor had been exposed when he was forced to verbally and publicly utter the commandment, and then answer Jesus' question. The emphasis in Jesus' reply is on, "What are you doing?"

So the only way the man could justify the law's clear demands for him to "love his neighbor as himself" was to internally limit his own personal responsibility to be a neighbor. In other words, he had to draw a line in his own mind that basically says, "For myself, I will go this far and no further in loving my neighbor."

A line can be drawn for a wide variety of reasons, maybe racial reasons, or gender differences. "Aw, she's only a woman." That is the way the Muslims are. They treat women terribly. To them, she is only a woman, and she can be put to death for things for which a man would not even receive a reprimand. But there is a line that has been drawn in their minds because of gender differences.

Then, there is cultural status difference. This is a big one. It appears to me that the administration now in power in Washington, D.C. is doing everything in its power to trick people into thinking that anybody who has any money is evil, that somehow they got that money by taking advantage of people, double-talking people, cheating people. And so there are cultural differences, status differences, and suddenly that person is not really a neighbor.

How about educational and occupational differences? How about ethnicity differences? We have one right here [in the Scriptures]: Jew and Samaritan. So a person draws a line in his mind because he does not have enough time. See, the priest and the Pharisee hurried by. I am sure, if Jesus would have explained more thoroughly, they knew the law, but they did not have enough time. They hurried on their way.

All I want us to understand is that these are realities, and there is a possibility for lines to be drawn in our life, and they have to be dealt with if we are really going to show ourselves to be a neighbor. So the priest (the Levite) and the Samaritan undoubtedly all had some mixture of these lines within them, but only the Samaritan pushed them aside and helped the robbed and beaten man, thus attesting who was neighbor to the man. Take notice of this, because it will become an important part of this sermon. It was the one who took pity upon, who was compassionate toward, who was concerned about, the injured man who proved to be the neighbor.

What we see here is a statement by Jesus that helps us to define biblical love. It is very evident to every one of us, and we will go over this a little bit more thoroughly later, that this love is primarily an action given. However, biblical love undoubtedly has an emotional aspect to it in feelings of pity or compassion, because it was both these factors that moved the Samaritan to render vital assistance, thus saving the man's life.

Though love *is* sometimes even biblically defined as what one does, there is more to it than that. So the lawyer then was forced, you might say, to answer Jesus' question as to who proved to be the neighbor. It was the one who did the helping. Another way of putting this would be, "Who acted as a neighbor *should*?" Jesus could have worded His question that way too.

The general church of God understanding of the parable should be, "Am I being a neighbor to the needy who cross *my* path?" Now considering the antipathy that existed between the Jews and the Samaritans at the time Jesus uttered this gives us a pretty clear indication from Jesus Himself of how far being a neighbor to those in need reaches out from our immediate circle.

I will just clarify that to you. He is telling us that it needs to move beyond those that we might have drawn a line against, which is something that one would ordinarily, without a converted person's understanding and a converted person's spirit, turn away from.

It is not always easy making judgments as to when to help and to how much help should be given, but Jesus does show in this parable that when someone who is right on our path needs help, we are obligated to give it. He Himself stated, "The poor you always have with you," indicating that judgments are going to have to be made when there is far more need to help than one can possibly give, and some people are going to have to be ignored, as it were, for the time being. When Jesus said that, He was ignoring the needy who existed to whom the money from the sale of the oil could have been given. You might call it "a biblical triage" situation or system.

This we must understand. The true worship of God—loving Him with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength—is intended by Jesus Christ to be a practical day-to-day matter. It is to be used in all of the ordinariness of life, because life keeps going on. We are Christians, and God expects Christians to use the things we are learning doctrinally about Him, about Jesus Christ, and about His way of life whether we are going to the bank, driving to work, when we are shopping, when we are eating, when we are playing, or whatever. It never ends. It is not limited to Sabbath services, nor is it limited to study and prayer time, even as important as they are.

Christian living requires serving God's creation, and loving those made in His image, and that includes *everybody* physically. There is a "however" to this. I think that the Bible shows that loving some is more critical than loving others, at least to the extent that God shows He is judging us on this or that more closely. Not only that, but the keeping of the "Love thy neighbor" commandment is most definitely restricted to helping those in physical need. In other words, that is going to come up, and our help can only be in that area.

Let us begin to pursue this "biblical triage system" somewhat, because God does make some statements that are fairly plain. The first thing we are going to do is go to Matthew 25. Pay attention to Jesus' words here.

**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 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, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'

"When you did it to one of the least of these My brethren." Can you begin to see a coming together, a joining of the two commandments? When we are loving man, we also love God. That is how closely Jesus Christ identifies His relationship with these people who are the subject of this parable. So in this case, Jesus identifies Himself with those who are part of God's on-going spiritual creation, which contains His Family.

I think we can reach a fairly safe conclusion that it is *these* who apparently receive first call on our attention to serve. I do not say that this is an absolute, but I think it is pretty clear that He is sending us this signal, and I think the linkage there is most clear, that when man is served, and that person is a part of the church of God, Jesus Christ is saying that God Himself is also served. There is a nice interesting statement that appears in Mark 9 that confirms this. Jesus is the speaker, and He says:

**Mark 9:41** For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.

"*Because* you belong to Christ." So here is an indication of reward given for rendering services to Christ's brethren. We can add something to this from II Corinthians 9. This principle here covers both what we saw there in Matthew 25 and in Mark 4.

**II Corinthians 9:7** So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

God not only wants the services rendered to His children by His other children, He wants it to be done wholeheartedly, sincerely, kindly, generously, as we will see in just a little bit. So what is God doing here? He is setting standards all along the path, and there is a reason for this. Do you know what that reason is? We will see it a little bit later, maybe more clearly.

If we are ever going to be like God, it had better be this way, because that is the way God does it. If we are going to imitate Him perfectly, following behind Him, watching Him doing things right before our eyes, we would see this is the way He does it. He makes the effort to serve. He does it in a kindly manner. He is cheerful about it, and He is generous. For that kind of service God says He is going to give a reward.

Let us go Deuteronomy 15. This gives us a principle about the way God told the Israelites to be.

**Deuteronomy 15:7-10** "If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs. Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your heart, saying, 'The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand,' and your eye be evil against your poor brother and you give him nothing, and he cry out to the LORD against you, and it become sin among you. You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand.

"Brother" here refers to a fellow Israelite. In the New Covenant sense this would be a fellow member of the Body of Christ. Again, on the surface at least, this indicates a priority given to those who are brothers.

God is being pretty clear about more than one facet of our loving our neighbor. In this case a neighbor is not quite a brother. We will see a little bit of this, but I think I am setting for you first that which takes first priority, and there is no doubt that among the church of God—those who are Jesus

Christ's spiritual brothers—these are the ones we are supposed to especially pay attention to in helping.

We are going to go back and step away from the "brotherly" sense for a bit here, and go to Ephesians 6. Remember this is general instruction that is given to a church of God congregation—children. See, that could be almost anybody.

In the New Testament approach to things, because of the context, it would be here anybody who is an employee.

**Ephesians 6:5** Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, [your bosses, your supervisors] with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ.

This is not dealing directly with anything where your boss is your spiritual brother as well.

Again, God is setting standards. It is not merely just being his neighbor, it is careful delineation of a number of standards.

**Ephesians 6:6** Not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.

This corresponds to being generous in spirit in one's service to one's employers.

**Ephesians 6:7-8** With goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.

Boy, is that not motivation? God says He will reciprocate. He does not go back on His word.

**Ephesians 6:9** And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.

That is fairly clear. Turn to Colossians 3.

**Colossians 3:22** Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God.

Let me just insert here that, "in all things," has to be qualified by, "as long as it is lawful." Sometimes employers will want you to do things that would break God's law, and may even be a crime in the eyes of men.

**Colossians 3:22-24** Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

It is pretty clear that we are to serve our carnal employers with the same kind of attitude with which we would serve Jesus Christ. I want to impress this over and over again, because it is really what this sermon is about. When we keep the second part of that commandment—"Love your neighbor as yourself"—we *are* keeping the first part, which is "Loving God with all your heart, your soul, your mind, and your strength."

Keeping the second of these two great commandments is part of the full-time worship of God, and in all cases we are expected to give of ourselves willingly. This is not always easy, because people with whom we have contact in the world are not always in a good attitude and cooperative. Some of them are demanding, full of themselves, bossy, narcissistic, and manipulative. They may be foul-mouthed bullies who always seem ready to explode in anger, and are very difficult to work with even under good circumstances.

They always seem to be with a chip on their shoulder, and always seem to be ready to be offended at anything you might say, with any look that is on your face. They are ready to defend themselves in a moment, and attack, and yet we are told we are to serve these people willingly. I think that is setting a pretty high bar.

Then, we have an added thing that is against us. In one sense, on the surface, they might not even care that you are a Christian, but Satan knows. The demons know, and they can put thoughts in those peoples' minds to try to rub you the wrong way, and they do not even know why they do it. Jesus said that persecution is going to come, and these people will think that they are doing God a service, and so they can think they are doing good. It is really all because you are a Christian, and they might not even know that, but the demon knows it, and can put those kinds of persecuting thoughts in the minds of those who are supervising you.

Now, because a person might be this way, does it open just a little crack in a door in God's eyes that we do not have to serve these people? Let us go to I Peter 2.

**I Peter 2:15-21** For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king. Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.

This section gives us a pretty clear overview in any given circumstance the incentive to retaliate in kind; that is, in the way somebody is treating you, which might be very great. But that is not the way our Savior behaved, so no permission is given us either.

Now what is commendable in His sight? Part of a Christian's witness for God, as well as his learning the God-Family's way of life and love, is to be a peacemaker. Sometimes the way of love requires a hefty measure of personal

sacrifice. We really have to bite the bullet. We really have to put a damper, a stopper, on our temper in the face of great provocation. This is what Jesus did. He avoided any retaliatory attack.

So, what are we learning here in I Peter 2? We are learning that obeying God makes peace. However—(and this is a *big* however)—that peace may not occur immediately. We have to do things; we have to follow our instructions, knowing that in the long run it is going to produce peace.

I mentioned to you earlier in another sermon that we do not obey God because the effects are going to happen immediately. We *do* obey God because we know the effects *will* take place in God's good time. It will work, and so the Christian always has to keep the Kingdom of God in mind, the future in mind, the return of Jesus Christ in mind, because then will begin the fulfillment of the peace that comes from doing what God says. This is very difficult for us to do, because not only is the present so real to us and our pain so great and our patience so short, and our vision so unclear, it is very easy to strike out in retaliation in kind to what is given.

Please do not think that Jesus did not defend Himself, because He did. He defended Himself with truth and with logic, but even here His responses were given in a thoughtful, self-controlled patience and kindness. His answers were not given in a blazing anger that would guarantee further inflaming justifications to continue the attacking by those who opposed Him.

Now, how can we keep ourselves in our calling to the end of having a far better chance of actually being commendable in God's sight? Do you not think that it would gratify God in His sight if we saw Him in every detail of our life? I am not saying that He is involved in every tiny detail, because I do not know that He is, but I do know that what I have suggested will please Him, because He says so in the Book. At the same time it will help us to do the right thing, because it is knowing God, being constantly aware of Him, fearing Him and respecting Him that motivates right conduct and leads to the keeping of that second of those two great commandments.

When the Church of the Great God began back in 1992, the first sermon given on purpose was "Do You See God?" David did, and this is why he so pleased God. This is why God said of David that he was a man of His own

heart. There is no doubt that God gifted David greatly, but David in turn used his gifts, and enhanced them as well. Even as a boy, he did not spend time playing what was then the ancient equivalent of current video games. He spent his time studying the creation and what it revealed about the Creator. Where do you think those psalms came from?

I am not saying that David did everything right, but I am saying that he had a very high batting average for doing things right—far higher than any of us. Think about the number of psalms that he wrote. Do you know that he wrote over half of them in the book? And then consider the instructive quality there is about the nature of God contained within the psalms he wrote. They give insight into God's will and purpose gleaned from David's relationship-experiences with Him.

Those psalms are indicative of the kind of thoughts that coursed through and developed in his mind, and why he so pleased God. They give me the distinct impression that he was relating virtually everything that happened to him in his life to his relationship with God. He must have been like a Philadelphia lawyer [asking] "Why?" "Why?" "Why?" This is indicative of a very instructive episode in David's life, recorded in II Samuel 16. It is also very well known by all of us, but it shows that David saw God as being involved.

**II Samuel 16:7-8** Also Shimei said thus when he cursed: "Come out! Come out! You bloodthirsty man, you rogue! The LORD has brought upon you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the LORD has delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom your son. So now you are caught in your own evil, because you are a bloodthirsty man!"

That was absolutely, virtually evil. David did everything in his power to respect Saul, even though he had already been anointed king to replace Saul, and Saul chased him all over the land. Even when David did what he did to show Saul he could have killed him at that time, he did not do it. Saul repented a little bit, and even said to David, "You are more righteous than I am," and walked away from him with his life still there. And so Shimei had an awful lot of lines drawn in his mind about submitting to David who was now king, and a king in trouble because David's whole household was

rebellious against him. It is interesting though, that even in the incident with Absalom, David chose to run to avoid a fight.

**II Samuel 16:9-10** Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Please, let me go over and take off his head!" But the king said, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the LORD has said to him, 'Curse David.' Who then shall say, 'Why have you done so?'"

Now maybe God never said those words, but He saw what was in Shimei's mind, and He did not stop it. So God took advantage of the situation to check David to see what he would do. Well, David responded the way a son of God should.

**II Samuel 16:11-14** And David said to Abishai and all his servants, "See how my son who came from my own body seeks my life. How much more now may this Benjamite? Let him alone, and let him curse; for so the LORD has ordered him. It may be that the LORD will look on my affliction, and that the LORD will repay me with good for his cursing this day." And as David and his men went along the road, Shimei went along the hillside opposite him and cursed as he went, threw stones at him and kicked up dust. Now the king and all the people who were with him became weary; so they refreshed themselves there.

I have no doubt that David knew what it says in Deuteronomy 8:2-3, how that God tested Israel. He deliberately allowed them to go hungry and to get thirsty to see what their response would be. Of course, you know what they did. They griped. But David related to God. Maybe he was being tested. David saw that God was so close and so interested in him, and that He was involved. He also knew that God deliberately tests us.

What this episode also shows us is that David took orders for his life from God, and his life with God issued forth in his actions toward men, for God so ordered it.

We can reach a conclusion here. Love for God must precede love toward men. It is therefore first and foremost; otherwise there is no infallible source for instruction on how to treat men. It is love for men that completes love for God. This expression helps fill love for God to the full. This action is love for God's creation, and at the very pinnacle of God's creation is the creation of man in His image. We saw that already. You do this because he is a brother and because he is a Christian.

Man is the very pinnacle of God's creation and has to receive first priority on the love of God in us being returned to God by serving our brethren. We have to follow then the revelation of His truth and the logic as revealed in the Scriptures.

We are going to step all the way back now to Genesis 1 just to pick up some commonalities.

**Genesis 1:26** Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

All of mankind has this in common. We are all creations of God. We are going to see other commonalities in Proverbs 14.

**Proverbs 14:31** He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker, but he who honors Him has mercy on the needy.

This verse helps us to see how close the tie is between the Creator and His creation. It is basically saying that loving the creation *is* loving the Maker. Let us continue to draw this out.

**Proverbs 22:2** The rich and the poor have this in common, the LORD is the maker of them all.

**Proverbs 29:13** The poor man and the oppressor have this in common: The LORD gives light to the eyes of both.

In a major way, all of mankind is in this together—ultimately. Right now it is not in it together, but yet in an overall sense, we are all in this together. The same God created us all, and the same God created us all for the same purpose, but there is a timing to the things He is working out. But in that sense, we are all brethren with one another.

**Malachi 2:10** Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another by profaning the covenant of the fathers?

Here this commonality is appealed to in a circumstance in which many from a broad section of people from every walk of life within the community of Judah were guilty of the same sins. So regardless of what station in the community, all were equally guilty. Are we really better than one another? Remember the time Jesus said, "He who is without sin cast the first stone"? No. None of us is sinless, and to break one law is to bring the death penalty. How does that affect the way that we look at other people? I will tell you in a little bit.

**Matthew 5:43-48** "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' [Notice, "it was said." That does not appear in the Scriptures anywhere.] 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.

What we saw here at the beginning was just a popular notion among the Jews of the day, that you can love those who love you, but you have to hate your enemy. That was not something God ever said. That was not His will at all. We are going to go back to the book of Leviticus 19 where that commandment appears.

**Leviticus 19:18** You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

**Leviticus 19:33-34** 'And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

Because of the context, verse 33 implies that both the sojourner (a Gentile) just passing through, and the resident alien in verse 34 (another Gentile) are to be given love by the Israelites in the same manner and level as was expected if his neighbor was an Israelite.

What Jesus said in Matthew 5 allows no hair-splitting when He expands His teaching there to even include enemies, regardless whether they were Israelite or Gentile. Instead, we are told through Jesus there to bless them, to do good to them, and specifically to pray for them.

Now, here it is going to get interesting. The term "love" used in the context of Matthew 5:43-48 is either the verb *agapao*, or its noun *agape*. I am finding that the exact definition of this quality of love is hard to put down in a single-line definition under every circumstance in which it might appear. It is the word most frequently used to describe the love of God: *agape*, *agapao*.

We in the church of God have attempted to define it as more or less a coldly calculating, positive action, like the keeping of the commandments. Indeed, in I John 5:3 it says: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments." So that is not wrong. I am not disagreeing with that, but I am adding to the understanding of this word, because that verse does not stand by itself.

**II Timothy 4:9-10** Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia.

Do you know that the word translated "love" there is *agapao*? Demas is doing something evil. He was doing something we are urged very strongly *not* to do, and *agapao*—the so-called "love of God"—is used to describe it.

It is obvious that Paul is describing an emotional feeling that has nothing to do with keeping the commandments, but its opposite—*breaking* the commandments. We are not to love the world. Demas was breaking the commandment.

Now back in thought at least, to Jesus' command in Matthew 5. *Agapao* is used in these passages of the Bible to describe a debased and selfish action such as we just saw Demas do, but here in Matthew 5 it is used to indicate a generous, warm, costly, self-sacrifice totally for another's good, such as Jesus did in *His* many sacrifices. *Agapao* cannot be restricted to activities devoid of any concern. *Agapao* very definitely has an emotional quality to it. Therefore, when Jesus tells us to love our enemies, He intends that there must be some element, some degree of emotion, of concern, of compassion toward them for their well-being. It is not just a coldly calculated action of good, merely the keeping of the commandments.

Recall in Jesus' Parable of the Good Samaritan that the Samaritan showed pity, compassion for the injured man. In the parable, the man who had the *right* emotion was the one who was moved to do the right thing, and thus became the one who qualified as a neighbor. The coldly calculated action is a good place to start, but it is nowhere near the higher standard that Jesus set Himself. The right balance between emotion and calculation is something that is going to have to come as a result of the creative act of God in us that grows out of our relationship with Him.

Look again at Matthew 5.

**Matthew 5:44** 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.

The next thing that Jesus said reveals a good place for us to start. We need the right balance. He then goes on to describe an extreme of God's indiscriminate generosity toward mankind. Verse 45 says He gives rain on

both the righteous and the unrighteous seemingly without distinction. We must be careful here, because it is not always this way. There are times when God gives good to the righteous and denies good to the unrighteous.

We should be able to begin to see that this subject requires a great deal of good, hard, discerning judgment to meet these standards, but as we will continue to see, Jesus is setting the bar very high, urging all of His disciples to elevate our loving action higher than those in the community around us.

I think that we can safely say that the coldly, calculating obedience to the commandments might be describing the lowest rung on the ladder of love. He is in effect saying that if we love only those who love us—those people who have the same interests and are likeminded—that this, brethren, is tantamount to loving ourselves. This is nothing more than an expanded selfishness, and Jesus will not accept it, and therefore in verse 38 He urges us to grow to a very high level of maturity, into being like our Father in heaven.

Let us conclude with the following scriptures.

**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.

**I John 4:20-21** If someone says, "I love God," 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 we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

Turn now to II Corinthians 5.

**II Corinthians 5:14** For the love of Christ compels [constrains] us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died.

He is saying that the love of Christ working in us is what begins to lead us and guide us. The word, "constrain," means to hold us in, to narrow us in, and push us, as it were, in a direction. Notice the direction that he taught.

**II Corinthians 5:15** And He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

We now live for Christ. We now live to please Him. We keep Him in mind, so that it is He who is guiding and directing our thoughts and moving us, as it were, in the direction in which He wants to create us.

**II Corinthians 5:16** Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh.

He is saying that we do not look at people the same way we used to, and it is because Christ is in us. One of the facets of this is that it gives us the opportunity to really love our enemy as Christ did. We are not there yet, but that is the direction that the love of Christ is constraining us toward. We no longer look at people the same way we used to.

**II Corinthians 5:16** Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.

Nobody ever went through quite the experience that Paul did. It seems like in the blink of an eye, that quick, his attitude toward Christ changed from enemy to One that he loved more than anybody else. We no longer look at Christ in the same way that we used to, and from Christ that has to extend, first to our brethren who are part of Jesus Christ, but it expands out. It keeps going out till eventually it is going to encompass everybody on earth.

**II Corinthians 5:17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

We are being created in the image of Christ so that we can do the kind of works that Jesus Christ does. We are a new creation. Old things have passed away. The way we used to look at people, the way we used to look at Christ is no longer the same as we do now. It is no longer the same. All things have become new. We are not there yet, but that is where we are headed.