

# The Most Difficult Command

## The Love of God

- We are speaking today of the Love of God and what it demands of us  
God's love is not simply something that He does but it is something that He expects
- There are three aspects that we are going to look at today
- The first two we will look at briefly – these will be a preface
- The third, the most difficult of the three, is where we will apply most of our time

So let's move on

## 1 The Love of God

- a) We spoke earlier about God's **attributes** – the different **aspects** and **qualities** that make up the character of God

**The bible declares that:**

1 John 4:8

8 "...anyone who does **not** love does not **know** God, for God **is** love."

NLT

**Four verses the Apostle John make this statement**

1 John 4:16

16 We know how much God **loves** us, and we have put our **trust** in his love.

God **is** love, and all who live in **love** live in God, and **God** lives in them.

NLT

- i) Here again in verse **16** of first John – the three times the English word **love** is used – it is a translation of the Greek work **agape**
- ii) A **limitless** – **boundless** love – a love **without** conditions
- iii) A love that is **infinite** and eternal
- iv) This love – with regards to God – has no **beginning** and will have no **end**
- b) Love is one of the **essential** qualities of God
  - i) That means that this quality is **necessary** for God to be who He is
  - ii) The reverse is also true – if God were not to have this **necessary** quality of love – then He would **not** be who He is
- c) Both first John 4:8 **and** first John 4:16 make the **statement**: "God is love"
  - i) This is a far **higher** concept then if we were to say, "God **loves**"
  - ii) It is true that God **loves**
  - iii) But to say that God **is** love – means that love is **fundamental** to who God is
  - iv) Thus everything that flows from **God's** character – flows from His "perfect **love**" – which is **lacking** in nothing
  - v) There is not **one thing** that comes from God that comes **apart** from His love – **because** love is **essential** to who He is
- d) God must love us **first**
  - i) This perfect eternal love of God **then** – **must** come first to His human creatures **from** Him
  - ii) Simply because we were **unable** to love Him – nor did we **care** to do so – in our **fallen** state

- iii) Love is **formed** in relationship – and **no** relationship was possible outside of **God** reaching out to us – This means **that** we were unable to **Love** God **until** He revealed Himself to us in a **personal** way
- iv) This is **still** the case for "those that do not **know** Him"

1 John 4:10

10 This is **real** love—not that we **loved** God, but that he **loved** us and **sent** his Son as a sacrifice to take **away** our sins. NLT

## 2 What is to be our response to the gift of God's love?

- This whole discussion should cause us to think about our **response** to the "**true** knowledge" of God's love
- How can we even consider **loving** as the members of the Trinity not only **love** each other – but **love** us as well
- God's love is **eternally** perfect – **eternally** vast – **immeasurable** – and **eternally** without conditions
- There is no "I will love you **if**" in God's love
- **Therefore** although this **immense** – **endless** love **demand**s a response – what type of **response** can we issue to Him?
- How can we as God's human **creatures** reply to a love of **eternal** value with **something** far less worthy?
- Yet this **agape** – this **love** is an **attribute** (a **characteristic**) of God that He **does** to some extent **share** with us

- a) Are we **commanded** to love God in the **same** way that He loves us?

### Listen to the response of the Lord Jesus to the questioning of the Pharisees

Matt 22:34-40

34 But when the Pharisees heard that he had **silenced** the Sadducees with his reply, they met together to **question** him again. 35 One of them, an **expert** in religious law, tried to trap him with this question: 36 "**Teacher**, which is the most **important** commandment in the law of Moses?" 37 Jesus replied, "'You must **love** the LORD your God with all your **heart**, all your **soul**, and all your **mind**.'" 38 This is the first and **greatest** commandment. 39 A second is **equally** important: 'Love your **neighbor** as yourself.' 40 The entire **law** and all the **demand**s of the prophets are **based** on these two commandments." NLT

- i) Our Lord drew here from two **passages** in the Pentateuch – Which is the first five **books** of the Bible

### In Deut 6:5-6 we hear

Deut 6:5-6

5 And you must **love** the Lord your God with all your **heart**, all your **soul**, and all your **strength**. 6 And you must **commit** yourselves **wholeheartedly** to these commands that I am giving you today. NLT

### Jesus placed this together with Lev 19:18-19

Lev 19:18-19

18 "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge **against** a fellow Israelite, but **love** your neighbor as yourself. I am the **Lord**." 19 "You must **obey** all my decrees. NLT

- ii) No righteous Jew and **especially** a teacher of the law would **dispute** the authority of these two passages
- iii) Our Lord **tells** the Pharisee that **if** Israel were to obey these two commandments **completely** and follow them **fully** – this would mean **that** in principle they would then be **obeying** "all that the law and the **prophets** demanded"
- iv) This command is **not** made easier when we understand that the word **Love** in the Greek is *agapao* which is the word from which we **derive** the word *agape*
- v) **Therefore** we are commanded to **love** as God loves – not only God **Himself** – but **all** humankind
- b) Jesus tells us **that** we are to Love our God – This is the first and **greatest** commandment
  - i) With all our **heart** – with all our **soul** – and with all our **mind**
  - ii) This **expression** is simply a Hebrew phrase for loving **completely** with our **entire** being
  - iii) We are to **love** God – **fully** – **without** reservations – **without** conditions
  - iv) This means **that** we are commanded to **love** God – **without** expecting anything in return
  - v) And along with that we are to love those that we come in contact with – all humanity – as we are to love God – We are commanded to love them as He loves us
  - vi) Let's look at the Apostle **Paul's** view of loving our neighbor

Rom 13:8-10

8 Owe nothing to **anyone**—**except** for your obligation to **love** one another. If you love your **neighbor**, you will fulfill the **requirements** of God's law. 9 For the **commandments** say, "You must **not** commit adultery. You must **not** murder. You must **not** steal. You must **not** covet." **These**—and **other** such commandments—are **summed** up in this **one** commandment: "Love your **neighbor** as yourself." 10 Love does **no** wrong to others, so love **fulfills** the requirements of God's law.

NLT

- (1) Why is it that Paul says that "**loving** your neighbor" – is the sum of the **other** commandments?
  - (a) It is because **true** love never **wrongs** another
  - (b) Therefore each of the other **commandments** that had to do with sins against our **fellow** man were **completed** in love
- (2) The word used for love in this passage is **exactly** the word that is used in 2 Peter 1:7
- (3) Paul explains that we have an **obligation** from God – to **love** as He loves
- (4) This **love** is seen in a social context
  - (a) We are not to **commit** adultery – **committing** sin with our neighbors wife or husband
  - (b) We are not to **murder** – **robbing** our neighbor of his or her life
  - (c) We are not to **steal** – **robbing** our neighbor of his or her possessions
  - (d) We are not to **jealously desire** the things that our neighbor **has** – whether this might be his or her **possessions** or his or her **wife** or **husband**
  - (e) These are all to be understood under our Lord's **definition** of neighbor
  - (f) We are to do **no wrong** to others (meaning everyone we come in **contact** with
  - (g) It is this type of **agape** that fulfills the **requirements** of God's law

**If all this that we have learned concerning agape was not challenging enough – there is one more subject that we need to visit before we end this segment**

### 3 Loving your enemies

- It would be less difficult to prove our **love** for God – if that proof just **depended** on our relationship with **Him** alone
- It becomes much more **challenging** if we need to **add** to that proof – our **treatment** of our neighbor – our treatment of **everyone** that we come in contact with

- But even this is nothing when compared to the **command** to "love our enemies"

**Listen to our Lord from a passage on His discourse concerning the demands of kingdom law.**

This mode of thinking is **far** higher than God's **previously** declared law under the **Old** Testament economy – it holds us **accountable** to the **Spirit** and **intent** of the former law

It holds us **accountable** to the **heavenly** standard of God's **holy** will concerning our **heart** and character

Matt 5:43-47

43 "You have heard that it was said, '**Love** your friends, **hate** your enemies.' 44 But **now** I tell you: **love** your enemies and **pray** for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may **become** the **sons** of your Father in heaven. For he makes his **sun** to shine on bad **and** good people alike, and gives **rain** to those who do **good** and to those who do **evil**. 46 Why should God **reward** you if you love only the people who love **you**? Even the **tax** collectors do that! 47 And if you speak only to your **friends**, have you done anything out of the **ordinary**? Even the **pagans** do that! 48 You must be **perfect** — just as your Father in heaven is **perfect**.

TEV

- a) Jesus tells His audience "you have heard that it was said, '**Love** your friends, **hate** your enemies.'"
  - i) Yet the Scripture only contains the phrase, "**Love** your neighbor as yourself"

**Listen to Leviticus nineteen verses eighteen through nineteen again**

Lev 19:18-19

18 "Do not seek **revenge** or bear a **grudge** against a fellow Israelite, but **love** your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord. 19 "You must **obey** all my decrees.

NLT

- ii) The question is **then** – where did the phrase "**hate** your enemies" come from?
  - (1) Rather than stressing the **hatred** of one's enemies – even the **Old** Covenant stressed **kind** treatment of those that had **chosen** to treat you unkindly

Ex 23:4-5

4 "If you come upon your **enemy's** ox or **donkey** that has strayed away, take it **back** to its owner. 5 If you see that the **donkey** of someone who **hates** you has **collapsed** under its load, do not **walk** by. **Instead**, stop and help.

NLT

Prov 25:21-22

1 If your enemies are **hungry**, give them **food** to eat.

If they are **thirsty**, give them **water** to drink. 22 You will heap burning **coals** of shame on their heads, and the **Lord** will reward you.

NLT

- (2) The Israelites **knew** that if they treated with **respect** those who **disrespected** them – it would **please** God – and **hopefully** convict the one that **hated** them to **change** their behavior
- iii) So if this was the **case** as far as God's will was **outlined** in Scripture – then where did the "**hate** your enemies" **phrase** come from?
- iv) It seems **evident** that this must have been the **established** teaching during the **time** that our Lord moved among His **people** in His **natural** body

- (1) There are some **passages** in the Old Testament that show the **feelings** of righteous Jews that were **struggling** with those that hated them
- (2) Even King **David** – who had many **enemies** would make statements such as the one in Psalm **One** Thirty Nine

Ps 139:19-20

19 O God, if only you **would** destroy the wicked! Get out of my **life**, you murderers! 20 They **blaspheme** you; your enemies **misuse** your name.

- (3) Anyone who has ever had to deal with those who **constantly** show evil intent for your life – might then express **feelings** like King David did
- (4) There are **many** places in the word that **show** similar incidents
- (5) Yet there is **no** where in Scripture where we are commanded to "**hate** our enemies"
- v) Yet this phrase must have been **common** and familiar to those that Jesus was speaking to at the time
  - (1) It could have even been **taught** by those in authority – to **those** that did not verify the accuracy of the statement by **comparing** it to the word of God
  - (2) In any **case** it seemed to be an **ordinary**, if not **widespread** teaching at the time for Jesus to **deal** with it in His conversation
- b) Rather than hating these that **persecuted** them – Jesus **tells** His audience – that it was the **will** of the Father – that they **pray** for their persecutors instead
  - i) The word that is translated "**persecute**" in the Greek **means** – "to **insult** or **treat** abusively"
  - ii) It also means "to **falsely** accuse" someone
  - iii) This same word that is translated "**persecute**" in Matt 5:44 is used in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter

**Listen to 1 Peter chapter three verse sixteen in the Amplified Version – so that we get the full force of the statement**

1 Peter 3:16

16 [And see to it **that**] your conscience is **entirely** clear (unimpaired), so **that**, when you are **falsely accused** as evildoers, those who **threaten** you abusively and **revile** your right behavior in Christ may come to be **ashamed** [of slandering your good lives].

AMP

**The word that is here translated *falsely accused* is the same word that is translated *persecute* in Matt 5:48**

- iv) Our Lord Jesus tells His audience that they are to **pray** for those that treat them this way
  - (1) An example of this can be found in the **life** of the Lord Jesus Himself
  - (2) **Jesus** – as He **hung** on the cross – **experiencing** greater anguish and torture – than **any** of us will ever know – **still** was willing to **pray** for the **forgiveness** of those that had placed Him there

Luke 23:32-34

32 Two others, both **criminals**, were led out to be **executed** with him. 33 When they came to a place called The **Skull**, they nailed him to the cross. And the criminals were **also** crucified—one on **his** right and one on **his** left. 34 Jesus **said**, "Father, **forgive** them, for they don't **know** what they are doing." And the soldiers **gambled** for his clothes by throwing dice. NLT

Even while our Lord hung **suspended** there – on that **instrument** of Roman torture in **unimaginable** pain – **suffocating** from the liquid **filling** His lungs – He **prayed** for His **persecutors**

They, on the other hand, remained **cold** and unmoved – they even made **fun** of Him all the more – They even became **indignant** and **offended** in their **self**-righteousness

Luke 23:35-39

35 The crowd watched and the leaders **scoffed** (cf. Psalm 22). "He **saved** others," they said, "let him save **himself** if he is really **God's** Messiah, the **Chosen** One." 36 The **soldiers** mocked him, too, by offering him a **drink** of sour wine. 37 They **called** out to him, "If you are the **King** of the Jews, **save** yourself!" 38 A sign was fastened to the **cross** above him with these words: "**This** is the King of the Jews."

39 One of the criminals hanging beside him **scoffed**, "So you're the **Messiah**, are you? **Prove** it by saving yourself—**and** us, **too**, **while** you're at it!"

- v) We might say to ourselves – “**Yes** but that was the Lord – He is **God** – He was **capable** of doing something like that”
- (1) I am not **able** – I am just a **man**
  - (2) I am not **able** – I am just a **woman**
  - (3) Yet we have **another** example in the New Testament of one that was **willing** to follow the example of his Lord

Stephen stood up to the **religious** leaders of Jerusalem – **pronouncing** on them their sin. **Because** of this they became **greatly** angry

The religious leaders of Jerusalem **dragged** our brother Stephen out of the city and **began** shower him with **heavy** stones to end his life.

While they were in the **process** of murdering Stephen – he **called** out in **prayer** to the Lord God

Acts 7:59-60

"Lord Jesus, **receive** my spirit." 60 He fell to his knees, **shouting**, "Lord, don't **charge** them with this sin!" And with that, he died.

NLT

Paul not **yet** an apostle – still going by his Hebrew name **Saul** was among the crowd as Stephen was **dragged** to the place of his death.

### **Acts 7:58 tells us**

Acts 7:58

They rushed at him (Stephen) 58 and dragged him out of the **city** and began to stone him. His accusers took off their **coats** and laid them at the **feet** of a young man named Saul. NLT

**In Acts 8:1 we learn that Saul (who later became Paul the apostle) totally approved of Stephen's murder**

Acts 8:1

8 Saul was one of the **witnesses**, and he **agreed completely** with the killing of Stephen.

NLT

Yet some years later after the Lord Jesus had **shown** Paul – now an Apostle – how **much** he would **suffer** for His name – Paul penned the following words...

Eph 5:1-2

5 Imitate God, **therefore**, in **everything** you do, **because** you are his **dear** children. 2 Live a life **filled** with love, following the **example** of Christ. He **loved** us and **offered** himself as a sacrifice for us, a **pleasing** aroma to God.

NLT

The Apostle Paul had now **learned** – what Stephen, at his death **understood** all those **years** before – To live a life **filled** with love – following the **example** of his Lord and Savior

Around the year 66 the Apostle Paul **also** gave his **life** as a martyr in a **Roman** prison – his head being **taken** off for the Gospel – for his **Lord** Jesus – and for his **Love** of God

### **This is the type of love and forgiveness that the Lord God expects of us**

- We once **too** were enemies of the cross of Christ
- We once **too** were enemies of God
- Yet while we were **still** in sin – and **deserved** death because of our **actions**
- Our Father sent His **Son** to be a **sacrifice** on our behalf – to pay the **debt** that we could not pay
- That we too might be His **sons** and daughters – that we might **share** eternity with Him
- How can we **understand** that type of love
- Yet we are now to **die** to ourselves
- We are to **die** to our plans
- We are to **die** to our goals
- We are to **die** to the things in the world that **cause** us to loose track of Him

### **We should cry out with Paul**

Gal 2:20-21

20 My old self has been **crucified** with Christ. It is no longer **I** who live, but **Christ** lives in me. So I **live** in this earthly body by **trusting** in the Son of God, who **loved** me and **gave** himself for me.

We are to **live** to **God** and His righteousness – we are to **allow** Christ to live His life in us **and** through us  
We are to **allow** the love of God to **flow** from us to a world that so **desperately** needs Him

- This is because the Father has **showered** upon us an incredible love
- One without **judgment**
- One without **conditions**
- One that is **limitless**
- One that will **never** end
- He has **claimed** us as His children
- And on the day that Christ **comes** He will **gather** us to Himself

Lord, I give up  
All my own plans and purposes,  
All my own desires and hopes  
And accept Thy will for my life.  
I give myself, my life, my all,

Utterly to Thee  
To be Thine forever.  
Fill me and seal me with Thy Holy Spirit.  
Use me as Thou wilt,  
Send me where Thou wilt,  
Work out Thy whole will in my life  
At any cost,  
Now and forever.  
- Betty Scott Stam (Martyred in China, in the 1930s)

### Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians chapter thirteen verses one through thirteen

1 Cor 13

13 If I could speak all the languages of **earth** and of angels, but didn't **love** others, I would only be a **noisy** gong or a **clanging** cymbal. 2 If I had the **gift** of prophecy, and if I understood **all** of God's secret plans and **possessed** all knowledge,

and if I had such **faith** that I could **move** mountains, but didn't **love** others, I would be nothing. 3 If I gave **everything** I have to the poor and even **sacrificed** my body, I could **boast** about it; but if I didn't **love** others, I would have **gained** nothing.

4 Love is **patient** and **kind**. Love is **not jealous** or **boastful** or **proud** 5 or **rude**. It does not **demand** its own way. It is not **irritable**, and it keeps **no record** of **being** wronged. 6 It does not **rejoice** about injustice but **rejoices** whenever the truth wins out. 7 Love **never** gives up, **never** loses faith, is **always** hopeful, and **endures** through every circumstance.

8 **Prophecy** and **speaking** in unknown **languages** and **special** knowledge will become **useless**. But **love** will last forever! 9 Now our **knowledge** is partial and **incomplete**, and even the **gift** of prophecy reveals only **part** of the whole picture! 10 But when **full** understanding comes, these **partial** things will become useless.

11 When I was a **child**, I spoke and **thought** and **reasoned** as a child. But when I **grew** up, I put **away** childish things. 12 Now we see things **imperfectly** as in a **cloudy** mirror, but then we will see **everything** with **perfect** clarity. All that I know now is **partial** and **incomplete**, but then I will know **everything** completely, just as God now **knows** me completely.

**13 Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.**  
NLT

## Praise Him for the majesty of His love

**Question: Are you willing to show your love of God – by loving God – by loving your neighbor – by loving your enemies – by laying down your life?**