

The Great Commandment

by Paris Reidhead

The sermon emphasizes the importance of loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves, and that this love is not just an emotion, but a commitment to seek the highest good and well-being of others.

Duration: 35:26

Scripture: Genesis 3:6, Leviticus 19:18, Deuteronomy 6:5, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 22:34-40, Mark 12:18-27, Romans 3:23

Topics: "Love"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker tells the story of John Freeman, a farmer in England who believed in and served the Baron. John's faith in the Baron led him to make sacrifices and take risks, such as leaving his family and not knowing if he would return. The speaker emphasizes that this kind of faith is what New Testament Christianity is all about. The sermon also touches on the importance of being a good neighbor and helping those in need.

Transcript

Your Bibles are open to the text of the morning, beginning with verse 33. There were three groups present on this occasion. The first were the Sadducees.

They'd had their moment, their hour, and we know a bit about them. We'll review it in a moment. And the second were the Pharisees, and we know something about them.

We'll remind our hearts more. And then there were the disciples, the followers of Christ, who had accompanied him. Now for a moment, think of the Sadducees.

Last Sunday, when we considered Christianity on Christ's terms, we learned that the Sadducees were the liberals of their day. They did not believe in the inspiration of the Torah. They did not believe in life after death.

They did not believe in the existence of angels, nor did they believe in the necessity for sacrifice and blood atonement. Then there was the Pharisees, who were just the opposite, the other pole. They were the fundamentalists of their day.

They believed in the inspiration of the Torah, they believed in life after death, they believed in the necessity of sacrifice and blood atonement. They certainly believed in angels. They were devout, praying five times a day, and the shortest of their prayers would have taken about 10 minutes.

And they fasted two days a week, and they tithed even down to the herbs. Someone would come and give a Pharisee a handful of mint, taken from a little weed or shrub that grew in the yard, and he would count it out in 10 piles and give one. Someone gave him some anise for seasoning his cookies, and he'd count the seeds out.

Oh, very devout. Now, the Sadducees had come to Christ with a question, what was going to happen in the resurrection? Of course, they didn't believe in the resurrection, and the Lord gave them that answer, which silenced them. And the Pharisees thought that they might do just a bit better.

And so they came to him, trying to trick him again, to test him. Isn't it amazing how ever-present seems to be the lawyer? Someone as well said that you can't get along without them, they were necessary, but if you let the lawyers run your business, you will be broke about one month before you would if you just let your broker run your business. You can't let either of them make the decisions.

Well, here they are, the lawyer, the one who's been trained in all of the Torah and is equipped to try to show his erudition and skill and logic and his forensic ability, and so he has a question. Because, you see, if the Lord answered it improperly, then they would really have something that they could use in accusing him. And so the question was, which is the first, the great commandment in the Scripture? And our Lord Jesus went back into the Scripture itself, and he brought the word, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all of thy heart, soul, and mind.

This is the first, the great commandment. And then, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. This is the second like unto it.

But notice how interesting is that next statement. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. In other words, here's a door, and it has two hinges, a top hinge and a lower hinge.

And you're never going to understand what's in the Torah or what is in the prophets unless you have used these two hinges and the door has opened. He has not identified these two commandments as the heart of the whole matter. Thou shalt love.

Notice what it tells us about God. God is worthy to be loved. He deserves to be loved.

Why? Because He is loved. And notice what it tells us about man. Man can be commanded to love.

Man has the ability to obey the commandment to love. Now, just those two insights. God is love.

Thou shalt love. What is love? We must divine it if we're to have any, any profit from the scripture. What is love? The definition with which we daily work, the one that's pounded into our ears with the music of the day and the poetry of the day and the literature of the day, is this, that love is an emotion.

Love is a feeling. It's a sensation, rather a state of mind, how you feel about somebody or how you feel about someone. Basically, the definition that we're, have thrust at us is that love is an emotion.

Now, think for a moment. Just think. If love is an emotion and you are commanded by God to love, that means that your emotions are under the direct control of your will.

If to love is to feel something about someone, be it God or oneself or others, if love is a feeling, if love is a sensation, if love is an emotion, then that means that you can command your emotions and you can obey your emotions. Now, to illustrate it, I've done this with many of you before. I do it again because I know no

better way to show you the folly of having, thinking that love is, or emotions are under the command of your will.

So, I'm going to count to three. And on the count of three, I want all of you, I'm going to select the emotion. God selected the love, I'm going to select the emotion.

And I think for the purpose of the illustration, the best emotion to have is a feeling of anger. All right? Now, you're all going to cooperate, aren't you? You're all going to, you're all going to prove that your emotions are under the control of your will. Now, I'm the one who's here asking you, instructing you, if you will permit it, commanding you to be angry.

Okay? Now, watch me closely. One, two, three, be angry. Ridiculous, isn't it? Just ridiculous.

Observe. Your emotions are not under the control of your will. Therefore, the love that God is, and the love that God commands, is not an emotion.

When it says that God is love, it does not mean that God is feeling warm and cuddly about man. Has nothing to do with emotion. The word love, as it's used in the scripture, has an entirely different denotation, and the failure to understand that distinction between love, as it's used in common parlance, and love, as it's used in the scripture, has led to enormous confusion.

Love is not an emotion. When it says God is love, it means that the total character of God is committed to that which love is. Perhaps an understanding of the English word love is going to help you to grasp.

We accept the word love as though it were just good Anglo-Saxon and had no roots. But the word love comes from Anglo-Saxon roots, indeed. The basic root is liphon.

Liphon. From which we have, still surviving, a word be-li. Be meaning to live or exist or have being.

Liphon, to gather with. Now, one of the tenses of the word liphon was luth. And from luth we have evolved love.

But it goes back to the root idea together with. For instance, here is John Freeman. John was a serf, and he was fighting with the baron, his master, in British soil as he sought to defend that barony from those who would attack and conquer it.

And there came a moment in the battle when John stood between the foe and the baron who had been pierced and fallen to the ground, and John fought them off and saved the baron's life. And in return, the baron has now made John a free man. He's no longer a serf.

He's no longer bound to the estate. He no longer works on the estate. He has his own freehold, land that has been deeded to him.

And he's John Freeman working his own farm. But the day that the baron gave him the freehold, he brought John in, and he said, John, in reward for your valiant service, your heroic assistance in my moment of need, I'm making you a free man. I'm giving you this purse, but I am asking you this, John, do you believe on me? And so John readily says, I do, sir.

And so the baron has his assistant bring a gold piece in a little linen sack bag. Then he writes on the bag, John Freeman in the day, and that gold sovereign is given to John. And John is instructed to put it

between his front teeth and to bite into the soft gold.

That was the early English fingerprint. That was better than a signature because the teeth made characteristic imprint on the gold. And that sovereign then was put into the bag, and it was tied, and it was put into the baron's treasure because it was proof that John Freeman had bitten the baron's sovereign, had believed he was together with, he was committed to.

Now, John has gone back to his farm. He's cut down the trees. He's made himself a house of wood.

He's put up a shed, a barn for his cow and his horse and his chickens and his pigs. He has his fields fenced. He has a small granary where he can store the year's harvest.

John Freeman is living the life of a free, old free man as a farmer in England. But still in that world of intrigue and unrest and avarice and greed, there were enemies that sought to overthrow the baron. And so one day there gallops into the yard of John Freeman one in the livery of the baron, and he salutes him and says, John, did he do him? Of course, he'd once been a serf with him.

And he says, John, have you bitten the baron's sovereign? Yes, I have. Have you believed on him? Yes, I have. Tomorrow morning before sunup, he'll be at the castle courtyard.

So early in the morning at two o'clock, he rises, takes a little water and a little food and his staff and his bow and his arrow, and he starts walking through the woods towards the castle. When he arrives, he finds that there are many fires that have been lighted outside the main gate. Another free man has gathered as well, for he wasn't the only one notified.

And after the gates have been opened, he's gone into the courtyard and there is seated the baron. John comes, John Freeman, and the clerk hands him the little bag and it's opened and says, John, did you bite this sovereign? I sire, I bit the sovereign. Then three days from now at sunup, be here, ready to train and to fight.

Make arrangements to be away as long as may be needed. I sire. John goes back and walks the distance and he waits two days, the next day getting everything in readiness, getting relatives and friends to help, putting the stock where it could be cared for, taking his wife and family or bringing someone there to stay with them.

And that morning comes when he goes with his wife and looks down into the little bed and sees there his son. With tears in his eyes, he bids his wife goodbye, takes staff and quiver and bow again and starts off, not knowing whether if he will return. But you see, he believed on the baron.

He bit the gold sovereign and believed and to live or exist in accordance with, together with, the will of the sovereign. Now the word love is from liphon, from luth, and it simply means to gather with, to seek the highest good and best interests and greatest fulfillment and ultimate happiness and fullest joy for that one upon whom one has believed or one has loved, one has luth, to one that's made a commitment. So when it says God is love, it means that God has made a total commitment of his entire being, all of his character and his nature, to seek the highest good and blessedness and happiness of the entire universe.

And everything he does, he has to do consistent with his purpose, to seek the highest good and blessedness and happiness and well-being of all creatures, great and small. God is love. Now let's turn for just a moment.

Thou shalt love. What does it mean? Well, it means that man has the capacity to decide with whom he will be together. Man has the capacity, the ability to decide upon whom he will believe.

Now let's go back to the garden. God has spoken to mother Eve and father Adam, and God has said, the day thou eatest of the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden, thou shalt surely die. And into that scene God has permitted his ancient foe to come, who says, you will not immediately fall over dead.

This fruit is not poisonous, you aren't going to die. The fruit is pleasant to eat, it's pleasant to look on, and it will make you wise. You think God is your friend and God is seeking your highest good and blessedness and happiness and well-being and satisfaction? Not so, not so.

God knows that the day you eat it, you'll know good and evil, and you'll be like God, and God doesn't want you to be like him, and he's jealous of his position, and therefore he's cheating you and robbing you, and God isn't love. Mother Eve listened. She saw the fruit, she handled it, she smelled it, smelled pleasant, and she ate, and she didn't fall over dead.

And then sometime later she went to husband Adam and she said, look, I've eaten of that fruit and I didn't fall over dead. You've got a choice now, you can either stay with God, who doesn't love you and doesn't want your highest good and blessedness and happiness, and who's trying to cheat you out of knowing good and evil, or you can stay with me. Now I'll tell you one thing, Adam, you only see God in the cool of the evening.

I'm with you all day long. Now you take your choice, old boy. And he made a choice.

He decided he was going to go with Mother Eve instead of God. What happened? He made a choice to love himself. In other words, to commit his will to the principle and the policy and the practice of seeking his own pleasure and his own satisfaction and his own good at the expense of God and at the cost and expense of others.

Now what do you have? You have some insight into the nature of God, and you have already had a definition as the nature of sin. What is sin? Sin is a committal of the will to the policy of pleasing oneself without regard for the best interest, happiness, and well-being of others and God. And that's exactly what he wants us to understand from this.

And this is why it's the door that opens into the meaning of the Torah. It tells us the nature of the law. So the committal of the will to the principle of pleasing oneself, of seeking one's own pleasure at the expense of another, at the expense of God, is the essence of sin.

And it's the power that God has invested in us. And the scripture says, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. In other words, everyone who's ever been born to the human family as at the age of accountability decided Mother Eve and Father Adam were right, and they made the same decision.

Now, I don't have to take time to explain. I don't know why. The scripture doesn't tell us why.

There have been those that have sought to speculate and develop their systems of metaphysics as to why everyone did it. But the scripture doesn't tell us why everyone did it. The scripture tells us all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Now, what is sin? Sin is a committal of the will to the principle, policy, practice of pleasing oneself without regard for the rights of God, the will of God, the pleasure of God, the satisfaction of God, or the rights of others. Now, thou shalt love the Lord thy God. To whom is he speaking? He's speaking to religious people who love themselves supremely, even though they devote themselves in a system of religious activity that's extremely costly and extremely demanding and not very satisfying.

But still, that's the people to whom he speaks. And he is saying to them, thou shalt love the Lord thy God. This is the great commandment.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and mind and soul and strength. Does he know about them? Yes. Whom do they love? They love themselves.

They're still sinners. He later calls them whited sepulchres. He tells them that they're platters.

They wash the outside of the platter, left inside greasy and dirty. He has some very unkind things to say about the Pharisees, the scribes. So he knows to whom he speaks.

He is saying to them, the first commandment, thou shalt love the Lord thy God. Now, what is the state of sinners? Loving themselves. A choice confirmed at the age of accountability, I'm going to do what I want to do.

And for those who've been brought out of death into life, they've been awakened, they've been convicted, they've been brought to repentance, and they've renounced in repentance that principle of pleasing themselves and have committed themselves to another principle of pleasing God with all their hearts and minds and soul and strength. That's the principle on which they govern their lives. Now, looking at that, you move to the next.

Thou shalt love thy neighbor. What means this? If the repentance is a change from, I'm going to please me, do what I want to do at the expense of God and others, and if repentance includes a decision that from today on I'm going to please God, that's the purpose of my life, to do what he wants me to do, to please God, to seek his highest good, his best interest. What is it in respect to loving our neighbor? Is it not to seek the highest good and blessedness and happiness and well-being of our neighbor? Certainly.

It's just the very reverse of the other. It's a change from, I'm going to do what I want to do, to a change, I'm going to do what he wants me to do, I'm going to seek to please him, and if I'm doing that, then I must seek to please in terms of the highest good. Many times with our children, we have to say things to them that immediately don't sound as though we're very interested in their highest good.

I never found any pleasure in being spanked by my father. I can't look back on it of any time and say that that was the way I'd like to spend my vacation. I mean, it just wasn't anything that was so thrilling and delightful and satisfying that I would ask for it.

I didn't have a masochistic cell in my body. I had no pleasure whatever in pain. But I cannot remember a time when he spanked me that I didn't need it and wasn't the better for it.

But at the time, it didn't seem at all as though it were necessary or certainly not pleasant. So I'm saying this that many times with others, we have to seek their highest good that isn't necessarily doing what they want us to do. Because if we did what they want us to do, many times I have found a temptation to do what people want me to do simply to get rid of them.

Because I don't care about their highest good and best interest and long-range well-being. That's a temptation. But what we've got to understand is that when we come to the place of loving God with all of our hearts, then we're going to have to view our neighbor as someone who deserves concern for their highest good and well-being and satisfaction and happiness.

Now, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. A moment ago, I said that the essence of sin is an inordinate improper self-love. Now I close by saying that the essence of true Christianity is improper self-love.

You have to love yourself. You see, you have great worth, you have great value. God made you in his image and his likeness that he might crown you with glory and honor, and therefore you have value.

Therefore you must seek the highest good and greatest blessedness and happiness for yourself. And you should make a list of the things that you want for yourself that are legitimate and proper. And when you've made that list of all the things that you have a right to want for you, then of course the whole thing is protected.

Because when you sign your name at the bottom of your want list, you have to sign my name right under it. Because whatever you want for you, you've got to want for me, I'm your neighbor. And whatever I want for me, I've got to want for you, you're my neighbor.

And to love my neighbor as myself means to commit my will to seek the best interest for myself, but also for my neighbor. So I don't think we need to be afraid now. Ayn Rand once wrote a book, *The Virtue of Selfishness*, and missed entirely the point in my judgment.

Because if she had understood the scripture, she would have understood that what you want for you, you have an obligation to want for your neighbor. That's biblical. That's scriptural.

That's not selfishness. That's New Testament Christianity. What do you want for you? Make a list of the things you have a right to want.

Once you have it, then you're going to have to make that same list. Well, my list included an opportunity for education, freedom to use my talent and my time and my education, freedom to use and retain a proper portion of what I had earned, live in a society that had sufficient food so that one could use one's earnings to purchase it. Oh, I had a long list of things.

Then that little silly box we keep in our living room did me wrong. You know, the neighbor is the person whose need you can see from your living room window. That's your neighbor.

But with that little boob tube in your living room, it made a neighbor of the whole world. And I sat there in my living room one day and watched some people down in Guatemala as they had a live broadcast. And the announcer said, Oh, another tremor has come.

And to see the mothers carrying their children and running where they could go to hide from falling blocks from houses, that too made Guatemala my neighbor. Thou shalt love thy neighbor. For me, it's been a mortgage for the last 20 years of my life trying to use talent and ability and resources and to mobilize the same to help provide employment and opportunities for people to live with some dignity.

That continues to occupy a great deal of my concern and my burden, because I take very real. Thou shalt love thy neighbor. The neighbor is the person whose need I know.

That's my neighbor. If I know the need, then they're my neighbor. I can see it from my living room window.

And I have an obligation. So what is love? Love is a commitment of the will on the part of God to seek the highest good of his creation and the part of me to seek my own highest good and yours. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and mind and soul and strength.

For thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. We're talking about a totally different definition of love, not an emotion, but a commitment of the will. Heavenly Father, there's so little we know about thyself.

We've so often thought that thy love for us was but a feeling instead of the fact that thou hast ordered the entire universe to the end of ensuring the greatest possible good and blessedness and happiness and well-being and fulfillment of creation. Thou hast shown us, Father, something of what this horrible crime of sin is and how it disrupts the universe as thou has ordered it. And thou hast bid us to change from loving ourselves supremely to loving thee with all of our hearts and minds and soul and strength.

And thou has commanded us to love our neighbors as we do ourselves, to seek their highest good as ours, thy greatest joy and blessedness and happiness and satisfaction with us. To that end, Father, we ask thee today to seal us as a company of people who are learning day by day to love thine with all our hearts and their soul and their minds, to understand the nature of that love and the obligations that it lays upon us. We ask thee for thanksgiving in Jesus' name.

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