

a sermon – MATTHEW 22:39 - On The Second Great Commandment:

LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR AS THYSELF!

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I. A PROPOSITION

If we truly love GOD first, shall we not also love our neighbours as ourselves?

II. THE TEXT - MATTHEW 22:36-40¹

36 Master, which is The Great Commandment in The Law?

37 JESUS said unto him, Thou shalt love The Lord Thy GOD with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38 This is The First and Great Commandment.

39 And The Second is like unto It, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

40 On These two Commandments hang all The Law and the prophets.

III. INTRODUCTION

Here in The Second Great Commandment, Our Lord JESUS CHRIST calls us from the city of man, where darkness and death reign supreme, into The City of GOD, where life and love reign supreme! We have here two paths set before us: Shall we hate our fellow man, doing unto others what we would never wish done to ourselves? Or shall we love our fellow man, doing unto others as we would have done to us? Shall we live in community with other men by the tarnished rule of man, or The Golden Rule of CHRIST our Saviour?

IV. THE GOLDEN RULE SUMS UP THE SECOND GREAT COMMANDMENT

Saint Thomas Aquinas compares The Law of GOD under The Old Covenant and under The New Covenant. The Law of GOD under The Old Covenant commanded Divine love in both justice and mercy, but did not drive it into the souls of men, but sought to conform men to its precepts externally. The Law of GOD under The New Covenant commands the same Divine love in both justice and mercy, but now seeks that it be "...poured into our hearts"² by the indwelling of The HOLY SPIRIT at The Cross of CHRIST. This is what The LORD caused the prophet Jeremiah to foresee when He declared through him in JEREMIAH 31:33, "...I will put My Law in their inward parts, and write It in their hearts; and [I] will be their GOD, and they shall be My people!"³

Our Lord gives us what is called "The Golden Rule,"⁴ which He proclaims in MATTHEW 7:12: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is The Law and the prophets."⁵ For if we truly love GOD, will we not have love for others over ourselves? If we truly honor The precious Body and Blood of CHRIST our Redeemer, which we humbly receive in The Sacrament of The

¹ 1, KJV, MATTHEW 22:36-40.

² 2, Catechism of The catholic Church, St. Thomas Aquinas on The New Covenant giving The HOLY SPIRIT to the saints of GOD, causing GOD's "charity" to be "poured into our hearts," # 1964, page 530.

³ 1, KJV, JEREMIAH 31:33.

⁴ 2, Catechism of The Catholic Church, # 1970, page 532.

⁵ 1, KJV, MATTHEW 7:12.

Eucharist – our Great Thanksgiving - will we not earnestly seek to obey all His Commandments?

We who are called by The Name of GOD The Son should not fail to reflect the great justice and mercy which GOD The Father has decreed for us His saints! This is the great Divine Love which Saint Paul writes of in ROMANS 5:8, that "...GOD commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, CHRIST died for us!"⁶ This is The Second Great Commandment, the sum of "The Law of The Gospel,"⁷ which CHRIST commands us to in JOHN 13:34, "A new Commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you..."⁸

But how can a man possibly live the kind of radical, righteous love which CHRIST commands of us? As Saint Aquinas observed, such a life requires the writing of The Law of GOD upon our hearts, that we be saved by CHRIST and that we be made new again by The HOLY SPIRIT working within us! The Golden Rule can not be kept by natural fallen man, but only by redeemed and regenerated man. As Walvoord and Zuck say, "Only a righteous person is able to practice This Rule and ...[live] the spiritual change that has come about in his life" by GOD's Spirit dwelling within him!"⁹

How shall we then "...love thy neighbour as thyself?"¹⁰ John Calvin answers, "For no man will ever come to obey This Precept, till he shall have given up self love, or rather denied himself, and till men, all of whom GOD has declared to be connected with Him [to love GOD first with all the heart, soul and mind], shall be held by ...[that man] in such estimation, that he shall even proceed to love those by whom he is regarded [and even treated] with hatred!"¹¹

V. TWO ROADS – THE LOVE OF SELF FIRST, OR THE LOVE OF OTHERS FIRST

We have two roads open to us: the one of the world, which is the city of darkness and death; the other of CHRIST, which is The City of life and love. The man that does not love GOD with all his heart, soul and mind shall - by his fallen, dark, sinful nature - chooses the first, of darkness and death. He shall in no way be able to love his neighbour as himself. And he shall suffer the terrible consequences there of, both in this life and in the next.

But the man that does love GOD with all his heart, soul and mind shall – in his election by GOD The Father, his redemption by GOD The Son and his regeneration and sanctification by GOD The Holy Ghost – chooses the second, of life and love. He shall find the strength of self giving to love his neighbour as himself, and when necessary,

⁶ 1, KJV, ROMANS 5:8.

⁷ 2, Catechism of The Catholic Church, # 1970, page 532.

⁸ 1, KJV, JOHN 13:34.

⁹ 3, Walvoord and Zuck, MATTHEW 7:12, page 34.

¹⁰ 1, KJV, MATTHEW 22:39.

¹¹ 4, Calvin's Commentaries, Volume XVI, love thy neighbour as thyself, [MATHEW XXII:39], page 305, paragraph 1.

even more than himself. And he shall receive the wondrous blessings thereof, both in this life and in the next!

VI. ETHICS OF LOVING ONESELF FIRST - THE CITY OF DARKNESS & DEATH

Saint Paul paints a picture of the man who loves himself above all others in ROMANS 3. This is the man whose heart is not centered on loving GOD first, nor his fellow man second, who like himself is made in GOD's Image. This is the soul which is not capable of doing to others as he would have others do to him, for he himself is the center of his own universe. In haughty rebellion against The King of The Universe, spurning The longsuffering Grace of GOD at The Cross of CHRIST, this is the man who lifts himself up to proclaim himself the measure of his own spirit as a god unto himself!

So the Apostle warns of the ungodly darkness within the unregenerate heathen man in ROMANS 3:12-18, "They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of GOD before their eyes!"¹²

A heart that does not know to keep The First Four Commandments, which specify man's duties to GOD, can not know to keep The Second Six Commandments, which specify man's duties to his fellow man. This is the picture of the heart darkened by sin that Saint Paul paints here for us. Such a heart can not know, being outside the Grace of GOD, how to rightly worship only The LORD; to keep itself from idols; to keep from blaspheming The Name of The Almighty; to keep The Lord's Day holy.

Why is this so? Going to The Second Table of The Ten Commandments, Keil and Delitzsch observe that Commandments 5, 6 and 7 - Honour your parents; Do not murder; Do commit adultery - refers first "...to deeds; the subsequent [Commandments 8, 9 and 10 - Do not steal; Do not bear false witness; Do not covet -] advance to the prohibition of the desire, [which is] proof that the deed is not to be separated from the disposition, and that 'the fulfillment of The Law [of GOD] is only complete when the heart itself is sanctified!"¹³

This is exactly what JESUS CHRIST purges from men, that their hearts first be made clean, that then their deeds may be righteous! It is not enough that the outside of the vessel be whitewashed, but that the inside of the vessel first be made clean by the washing of The HOLY SPIRIT! So The Lord declares in MATTHEW 15:18-19 that what defiles men and leads them to break GOD's Commandments "...come forth from the heart... For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies!"¹⁴

¹² 1, KJV, ROMANS 3:12-18.

¹³ 5, Keil and Delitzsch, THE SECOND BOOK OF MOSES, CHAP. XX, Vers. 13-17, page 123.

¹⁴ 1, KJV, MATTHEW 15:18-19.

VII. ETHICS OF LOVING OTHERS FIRST – THE CITY OF LIFE & LOVE

Our Redeemer JESUS CHRIST in contrast paints a picture in MATTHEW 5 of the man who loves others as himself – and even more than himself - because he first loves The LORD. This is the man whose heart is centered on loving GOD first, then his fellow man second, recognizing The Image of GOD in his fellow man as much as in himself. This is the soul which as a result daily lives The Golden Rule, doing to others as he would have others do to him. For the Christian man, The Almighty is the center of his universe, and The Son of GOD is the measure of his spirit, in humble obedience and thankfulness to Him!

So The Saviour proclaims GOD's blessings upon the regenerate Christian man in MATTHEW 5:3-9, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is The Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see GOD. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of GOD." ¹⁵

John Calvin observes how much we as Christians are called to give for CHRIST, Who gave Himself completely for us, even unto death! Believer in CHRIST "...are not only forbidden to ask ...[revenge upon their abusers] from GOD, but are commanded to banish ...[even the thought of] it from ...their minds so completely, as to bless their enemies. ...[For the Christian is to join with The Almighty in desiring] that the wicked should return to a sound mind, that they may not perish; and thus ...[Christian men] endeavor to promote their salvation!" ¹⁶

CHRIST continues in MATTHEW 5:10-12 - that even when we are oppressed, attacked, injured and even murdered for our righteous innocence in Him - we are blessed: So He gives us these most deeply challenging and often hard but true Words: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is The Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in Heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you!" ¹⁷

And in the saints' suffering for their righteousness and faith in JESUS CHRIST, Calvin continues that , "...there is still this consolation, by which all their distresses are soothed. ...that GOD will be The Avenger of obstinate wickedness, so as to make it manifest, that those who [- being His people -] are unjustly attacked are the objects of His care. It is very difficult indeed, and altogether contrary to the disposition of the flesh, to render good for evil... [Even so,] we ought simply to inquire, what is demanded by The Law of Charity [in CHRIST]; for, if we rely on the heavenly power of The Spirit [of

¹⁵ 1, KJV, MATTHEW 5:3-9.

¹⁶ 4, John Calvin, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, [MATHEW XXII:39], page 305, paragraph 2.

¹⁷ 1, KJV, MATTHEW 5:10-12.

GOD], we shall encounter successfully all that is opposed to...” The HOLY SPIRIT working in us!¹⁸ Therefore shall we be blessed, even in our suffering for His sake!

VIII. IN CONCLUSION

Our Lord JESUS CHRIST commands us in The First Great Commandment to “...love The Lord Thy GOD with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind!”¹⁹ But the unregenerate man is not capable of truly keeping This Commandment, for only by GOD’s Spirit can we come to have GOD’s Law – as Saint Aquinas says - “...poured into our hearts.”²⁰ Our Lord JESUS CHRIST commands us in The Second Great Commandment to “...love thy neighbour as thyself.”²¹ But the soul that is not redeemed by CHRIST can not know to love others first because it can not know to love GOD first.

How then may we truly love GOD first, that we might then love our neighbours as ourselves? How can we not walk in the sinful city of darkness of death, but instead enter into The righteous City of life and love? How can we keep from the evil thoughts and desires that defile our hearts, leading us to break The Almighty’s Ten Commandments in our words and deeds? It is to be found, as Saint Paul says in ROMANS 5:8, in this: that “...GOD commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, CHRIST died for us!”²² Let us then seek the Grace of GOD at The Cross of our Saviour JESUS CHRIST, for He will not turn away the man who earnestly seeks His face! Then, and only then, will we be able to truly love GOD first, and then also love our neighbours as ourselves! In The Name of GOD The Father, and The Son and The Holy Ghost. AMEN.

¹⁸ 4, Calvin’s Commentaries, Volume XVI, love thy neighbour as thyself, [MATHEW XXII:39], page 305, paragraph 2.

¹⁹ 1, KJV, MATTHEW 22:37.

²⁰ 2, Catechism of The catholic Church, St. Thomas Aquinas on The New Covenant giving The HOLY SPIRIT to the saints of GOD, causing GOD’s “charity” to be “poured into our hearts,” # 1964, page 530.

²¹ 1, KJV, MATTHEW 22:39.

²² 1, KJV, ROMANS 5:8.

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