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# Jesus and the Ethic of Love: A Critical Examination of a New Covenant

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**Jesus and the Ethic of Love:  
A Critical Examination of A New Covenant**

A Thesis by

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Presented to

the Faculty of

Loyola Marymount University

Department of Theological Studies

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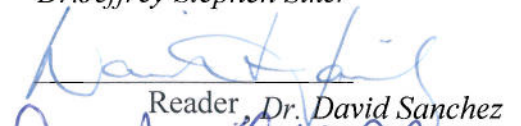
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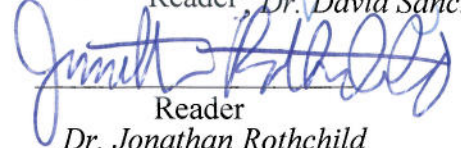


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Dedicated to my brother Justin Sabol, who was always there to listen to my ideas about the Greatest/New Commandment as well as having spent countless hours proof readings this thesis.

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Enim veritatis et amoris

## **Jesus and the Ethic of Love: A Critical Examination of A New Covenant**

In this thesis I would like to examine and identify the most important fundamental ethical command that exists within the New Testament that is attributed to Jesus. Found in the four Gospels it is the “Greatest/New Commandment<sup>1</sup>” that Jesus imparts to his disciples which reflects a radically powerful command that stands as an ethical rule that should act as an essential guide to all Christians throughout their lives and is also the root of all of Jesus’ teachings and actions. The fundamental command to love God and neighbor has deep roots in the Jewish scriptures, but Jesus was the most prominent prophet to combine the two commands into a single command, as well as give it the prominence and weight of being the highest/greatest command. While examining the Gospels’ double love command<sup>2</sup> the first question that arises is what did the Gospel writers intend when they related Jesus’ “Greatest/New Commandment?”<sup>3</sup> To understand what the authors of the Gospels were trying to convey, a textual analysis must be conducted on the double love command in all four Gospels in the hopes that a uniform ethical message will emerge. The Gospel of John is unique in that it does not use the same source material as the Synoptic Gospels for the “Greatest/New Commandment,” but it does command similar actions of those who believe, and will be examined later. One

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<sup>1</sup> Only in the Gospel of John does the author refer to the double love command as the New Commandment, which not only makes the Gospel of John unique, but the command is also transformed from the double love command to the more personal command to love one another as Jesus loved them.

<sup>2</sup> I will refer to the command to love God above all else and to love one’s neighbor, as one’s self as the double love command.

<sup>3</sup> It is impossible to differentiate between what the authors recorded and the true intentions of Jesus, since I am relying on the Gospels as the sole source of information not only about Jesus but also about His Greatest/New Commandment.

should not presuppose that a uniform ethic will emerge, but based on the similarities of the Synoptic Gospels' double love command as well as a similar core message found in the Gospel of John it is very likely that one will emerge. Before I examine each Gospel I would first like to examine the origins of the two separate love commands, namely the commands found in Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, to further deepen our understanding of the message the Synoptic Gospels were trying to portray. There is a consensus<sup>4</sup> that both Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 were combined to form the double love command that is found in the Synoptic Gospels and therefore can be examined to extract the meaning of each separate command and how they played a part in influencing not only Jesus but the authors of the Synoptic Gospels. We will try to understand the radical commandment, referred to as the "Greatest Commandment" in the Synoptic Gospels<sup>5</sup> and the "New Commandment" in the Gospel of John<sup>6</sup>, from the point of view of what the authors intended. By systematically examining not only the Gospel text but also the writing that preceded it the importance and emphasis that the authors of the Gospels originally intended and ultimately what Jesus himself originally meant should be uncovered. The process of uncovering what Jesus originally intended in relation to the double love command is paramount in understanding the ethical implications, but at best one can only come to an educated guess on what that intent was. In the opinion of A. Hultgren, while the double love command did exist before Jesus' time it was never given the prominence and weight that Jesus and the authors of the

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<sup>4</sup> See Pheme Perkins, *Love commands in the New Testament*, Victor Paul Furnish, *The Love Command in the New Testament* and Kurt Aland ed., *Synopsis of the Four Gospels* as but three sources that make this claim.

<sup>5</sup> The "Greatest Commandment" that will be examined is found in Matthew 22:37-40, Mark 12:29-31 and Luke 10:25-28.

<sup>6</sup> The "New Commandment" that will be examined is found in John 13:34-35.

Gospels gave it, nor as Delitzsch believed, was it combined to direct one toward salvation<sup>7</sup>.

The combined command to love God above all else and to love one's neighbor is also found in The Book of Jubilees<sup>8</sup> as well as The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs<sup>9</sup> (specifically the Testament of Issachar, Daniel and Benjamin). We will examine the emphasis and importance it received in each of these books. After examining the history of the double love command, both as separate commands as well as when they were combined, I will then examine the three Synoptic Gospels to see if a uniform message emerges. From there we will move on to the Gospel of John to see what ethical meaning and power it adds to the double love command.

## SYNOPTIC PARALLELS

In the Synoptic Gospels the double love command, love of God and love of neighbor, "vary greatly, and there is no clear, generally agreed upon answer to the question of interrelationships."<sup>10</sup> And while each Gospel may have relied on independent sources it should be understood that for the sake of this investigation I will agree with Hultgren when he proposes that the two commands, linked together, were attributed to Jesus at a very early stage in the tradition.<sup>11</sup> It should also be noted that each of the three Synoptic Gospel authors are reporting a similar command attributed to Jesus, even if the

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<sup>7</sup> Arland J. Hultgren, "Double commandment of love in Mt 22:34-40: its sources and compositions." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36 no.3 (1974), pg.373.

<sup>8</sup> R.H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English with introductions and critical and explanatory notes to the several books* v.2, pg.1-82.

<sup>9</sup> R.H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English with introductions and critical and explanatory notes to the several books* v.2, pg.282-367.

<sup>10</sup> Hultgren, "Double," pg.373

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

situations and scenes appear to be somewhat different. While the authors of the Gospels of Luke and Matthew used the same source material as Mark, it cannot be mere coincidence that each Synoptic Gospel prominently placed the double love command in the context of the “Greatest Commandment.” The result of the authors of the Synoptic Gospels using the same source material, but with the context in each Gospel differing slightly<sup>12</sup> results in a singular coherent ethical message. This message or command explicitly dictates what Jesus expected of his followers and can serve as the most fundamental message that Christians should live by.

I will begin my textual analysis of Mark, followed by Luke and concluding with Matthew, to try and discover the meaning the authors were trying to convey. By first illuminating each Gospel’s meaning and then comparing them against each other I will uncover the similarities and differences with the goal that a singular ethical message from Jesus Christ can be ascertained, if one exists. If there is not a singular message from Jesus Christ to be unearthed, then perhaps by focusing on the similarities of the different Gospels’ love commands a similar ethical message from each of the Synoptic Gospels will emerge, meaning that while a focused singular message may not be identified there may be a command that is found in each Synoptic Gospel that is similar to the others. The Gospel of John’s “New Commandment” will then be examined to see if it will add and deepen the overall ethical meaning of Jesus’ commandment of love. Once a coherent meaning of the double love command is achieved, I will then examine the ethical implications of such a command, as well as what impact such an ethical commandment has on believers in Christ. The need to emphasize a fundamental ethical command is

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<sup>12</sup> In the Gospel of Luke a scholar of the law tests Jesus with Jesus asking the scholar what is written in the Law, while in Mark a scholar of the law questions Jesus and he answers the scholar, and in the Gospel of Mark a scribe questions Jesus with Jesus responding.

imperative to each and every Christian, not only to unify all Christians but also to establish a minimal ethical standard that will help Christians to better understand exactly what is expected ethically if you are a Christian, not necessarily what a Christian believes but how their beliefs influence how they act in their everyday life. The task here is to establish a concise fundamental answer to how one should act if they subscribe to the core beliefs of a Christian and treat others based on those beliefs. The need to establish the gravity of this command as the foundation of all of Jesus' teachings and actions is paramount if one is committed to understanding the message of Jesus Christ. My goal is that by emphasizing the double love command, as the authors of the Gospels had originally intended it, would be to establish a core understanding of exactly how one should act if they are Christian, and ultimately this should inform what one believes. This command should be at the core of all Christian beliefs, but is by no means an exhaustive answer to how a Christian should act or what it means to be Christian, but it should be viewed as the foundation from which all other commands and deeds that Jesus performed sprang from. A minimum ethical standard is imperative not only for people converting or discovering the Christian faith, but essential for Christians in America to regain a deep and concise understanding of what Jesus expects of all of his followers. It is also my intention to systematically prove how the double love command could be an almost all-encompassing ethical rule to live by, not only dictating how a Christian ought to act but also influence what a Christian should believe. The double love command is at its core less an ethical command and more a relational command, dictating that a Christian should "become neighbors," or friends with all of the people he or she



encounters, and only then to ethically love them as one loves God, or as the author of the Gospel of John put it, to love them as Jesus has loved us.

## **EXPLORING DEUTERONOMY AND LEVITICUS AS SOURCES OF THE LOVE COMMAND FOUND IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS**

All three of the Synoptic Gospels rely on the Septuagint for the two love commands from Deuteronomy and Leviticus respectively, only slightly changing the commands to fit into the context of the Gospel in which they were placed. Two questions arise: first, was the average person aware of these two commands, and secondly, was it truly radical<sup>13</sup> to combine the two? The “two commands from the Mosaic Law, the first are found in the expanded Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4-9), which the faithful Jew was to recite twice a day, and the second from Leviticus 19:18. The first command insisted on the absolute love of Yahweh in a total personal response; the three (or four faculties (heart, soul, might, [and mind]) were meant to sum up the totality of undivided dedication to [GOD]. The second command, which is quite distinct in the OT, being derived from the so-called Holiness Code of Leviticus (chaps. 17-26), demands of the Israelite the same attitude toward one’s neighbor as toward Yahweh himself.”<sup>14</sup> The ethical connection between love of God and neighbor is derived from the second command, and ultimately reaches its full ethical potential in the Gospel of John.<sup>15</sup> As evidenced in Luke the average Jewish person would be aware of, at the very least, the first command, since

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<sup>13</sup> The term “radical” is meant to mean completely new, not necessarily by combining the two commands but in the meaning of the combined commands.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke: introduction, translation and notes*, pg.878

<sup>15</sup> In the Gospel of John, the love one has for God is replaced by the love Jesus has for humankind.

it was recited daily. It is known that a command to love both God and neighbor did exist, found in the Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament, specifically the Testament of Issachar,<sup>16</sup> but it “[does] not reduce the whole law to the double commandment, [and] they do give that commandment a prominent place at the end of a list of commandments.”<sup>17</sup> Subsequently, this makes the context of Jesus’ double love command extremely radical, not only in originality but in meaning. Since each Synoptic Gospel used the same tradition found in Deuteronomy and Leviticus, it would be prudent to also examine how love was understood in the context of these commands. By understanding how love was understood by the authors of Deuteronomy and Leviticus one would gain and understanding of how that meaning influenced the authors of the Gospels. The most obvious would be how a person is to love God, since each Gospel cites Deuteronomy 6:5. Understanding that particular part is crucial to understanding the command as a whole. Deuteronomy 6:5 says that one “shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.” Fitzmyer believes that “the aspects of the human person so expressed have to be understood in the OT sense: *kardia*, ‘heart,’ as denoting the more responsive and emotional reactions of a human being; *psychê*, ‘soul,’ the vitality and consciousness of a person; *ischys*, ‘might,’ the powerful and instinctive drive; and *dianoia*, ‘mind,’ the intelligent and planning qualities. As a group, they sum up the totality of personal life.”<sup>18</sup> Basically Deuteronomy is saying that a person should love God with every inch of his or her being, explicitly showing the reader how one is expected to love God and subsequently how God loves us. W.D. Davies agrees: “the

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<sup>16</sup> R.H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English with introductions and critical and explanatory notes to the several books* v.2, pg.326-327.

<sup>17</sup> Charles, *The Apocrypha*, pg.326-327.

<sup>18</sup> Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke*, pg.880

three faculties, ‘heart,’ ‘soul,’ and ‘mind,’ first of all represent the entire person; so the demand is for total allegiance: one should love God with every globule of one’s being.”<sup>19</sup> By understanding how one is to love God, one should also understand how to love one’s neighbor. Since “the Old Testament is the word of God and should be obeyed with an undivided heart, with one’s life, even to martyrdom, and with one’s attitude to and administration of mammon; and these things in turn cannot be done without love of neighbor.”<sup>20</sup> To truly love God with “every globule of one’s being” one must also love one’s neighbor, for humankind is the greatest creation of God and if one loves God one must also love what God created, hence the loving of one’s neighbor<sup>21</sup>. By combining these two commands is to simply understand that to follow the first with an “undivided heart”, one must also follow the second, and vice versa.

## **EXAMPLES OF THE DOUBLE LOVE COMMAND IN THE PSEUDEPIGRAPHA OF THE OLD TESTAMENT**

In this section I shall examine the double love command from two viewpoints, first from Palestinian Judaism which developed the tradition of the command to love one’s neighbor or brother “out of inner Jewish concerns,”<sup>22</sup> which included the love of God and neighbor not prominently together but only among several other commands. From the Hellenistic Jewish tradition which “sought to make Judaism more intelligible in the

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<sup>19</sup> W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr. *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*. pg.241

<sup>20</sup> Davies and Allison, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*. pg.241

<sup>21</sup> In this instance the word neighbor is used as the universal neighbor, meaning that all people on earth are one’s neighbor in some capacity.

<sup>22</sup> Pheme Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament*. pg.12, Those concerns would be the continued existence of the Jewish community, which faced threats from many other ethnic groups.

larger Hellenistic environment,<sup>23</sup> by explicitly linking the love of God and neighbor together as a coherent command, and for the purpose of this study, more important in understanding the development or lack of development of the double love command.

First I shall examine the Palestinian Jewish tradition. “The ‘love of neighbor’ command in Leviticus 19:18 was often used to reinforce the boundaries of the Jewish community.”<sup>24</sup> An example of this command was found as an “inscription on Jewish tombstones [which] identify ‘loving one’s brother,’ that is, one’s fellow Jew, as a virtue that merits reward.”<sup>25</sup> This inclusive approach to love of neighbor would be expanded by the authors of the Gospels, but until they expanded the meaning of neighbor to be more universal, most early sources that proclaim to love one’s neighbor mean one’s fellow Jew. “Rabbinic sources show a similar interpretation of the passage. The command to love one’s fellow Jew appears in stories of the final instructions of the patriarchs along with other commandments from the Decalogue as an indication of the exemplary righteousness that the patriarch wants his children to exhibit.”<sup>26</sup> The command to love God and neighbor fail to appear simultaneously but are grouped together among many other commands:

And in the twenty-eighth jubilee Noah began to enjoin upon his sons’ sons the ordinances and commandments, and all the judgments that he knew, and he exhorted his sons to observe righteousness, and to cover the shame of their flesh, and to bless their Creator, and honour father and mother, and

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<sup>23</sup> Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament*, pg.12

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

love their neighbor, and guard their souls from fornication and uncleanness and all iniquity.<sup>27</sup>

Another example that more explicitly stated the double love command while still found among a collection of commandments is once again found in Jubilees and given by Abraham:

And he commanded them that they should observe the way of the Lord; work righteousness; each love his neighbor and act in this manner among all men, each should walk with them so as to do righteousness and justice on the earth... I implore you, my sons, love the God of heaven and cleave to his commandments. Do not walk after their idols, and their uncleanness; do not make molten of graven gods, for they are vain, and there is no spirit in them; for they are the work of human hands and those who trust in them trust in nothing. Do not serve them or worship them but serve the Most High and worship Him continually.<sup>28</sup>

It is evident from these two examples that the double love command did exist and was in literature that existed in the time and place of Jesus, but it should be noted that in both of these excerpts neither the prominence nor the immense weight that Jesus gave his “Greatest Commandment” is present. Also, the context of Palestinian Judaism the meaning of “neighbor” and “brother” clearly refer only to other people who belong to the Jewish community and in no way should be taken to be inclusive of all people.

The double love command in Hellenistic Judaism used examples out of the same literature and attempted to link the two commandments, that of love of God and love of

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<sup>27</sup> Charles, *The Apocrypha*, pg.24 (The book of Jubilees v.7:20-21)

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pg.42, (The book of Jubilees v.20:2-10)

neighbor, together into a cohesive unit while also expanding the meaning of one's neighbor to be inclusive of all people regardless of ethnicity.<sup>29</sup> Perkins writes that the difference between the traditions of Palestinian Judaism and Hellenistic Judaism is one of orientation.<sup>30</sup> "Some traditions seem to have developed out of inner Jewish concerns; which seem to have sought to make Judaism more intelligible in the larger Hellenistic environment,"<sup>31</sup> and subsequently chose the appropriate passages that conveyed this message. In the Hellenistic Judaic tradition, which was present at the same time and places Jesus was present, only two examples of the combined command of love of God and neighbor appear,<sup>32</sup> which we shall focus on to see if it will illuminate the foundation from which Jesus ultimately built his "Greatest Commandment." Both examples that I shall examine are found in the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs: The Testament of Issachar*, which R.H. Charles believes "is the first literary authority to conjoin the two great commands of love to God and love to our neighbor."<sup>33</sup> The first instance is found in the story of Esau and Jacob, which Perkins believes "was a natural place for reflection on the relationships between brothers."<sup>34</sup> Also Perkins believes that the following example seems to be the closest to the form of the double love command in the tradition that Mark used:

Keep, therefore, my children, the law of the God. And get singleness (of heart)<sup>35</sup> and walk in guilelessness, not playing the busybody with the

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<sup>29</sup> Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament*, pg.15

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pg.12

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pg. 12

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pg.15

<sup>33</sup> Charles, *The Apocrypha*, pg.292

<sup>34</sup> Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament*, pg.16

<sup>35</sup> Added to the Perkins' translation, pg.16

business of your neighbor. But, love the Lord, and your neighbor, have compassion on the poor and the weak.<sup>36</sup>

“The patriarch Issachar goes on to hold himself up as an example. Some interpreters’ think that the love command here does not refer simply to one’s fellow Jew but intends to refer to any person with whom one deals. You will also notice that this version adds the specification ‘with my whole heart’ to love of neighbor rather than to love of God as we find in the Gospel versions.”<sup>37</sup> In this second passage, as well as in Leviticus. 19:18, in referring to neighbor the “sphere of neighborhood is limited to Israelites, but in [Jesus’] use there is no limit of race or country.”<sup>38</sup> The evidence of the inclusive messages of Jesus in general and the story of the Good Samaritan in particular<sup>39</sup> solidify Perkins’ statement about the inclusiveness of the Gospels’ authors meaning of neighbor. The second instance of the combining of the command to love God and neighbor is once again found in the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs: The Testament of Issachar*:

Except my wife, I have not had any women. I have never committed fornication by the uplifting of my eyes. I drank not wine to be led astray thereby; I coveted not any desirable thing that was my neighbor’s. Guile arose not in my heart. A lie passed not through my lips. If any one man were in distress, I joined my sighs with his, and I shared my bread with the poor. I wrought godliness; all my days I kept truth. I loved the Lord;  
Likewise also every man with my (whole)<sup>40</sup> heart.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Charles, *The Apocrypha*, pg.326-327 (Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs: The Testament of Issachar v.5:1-2)

<sup>37</sup> Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament*, pg.16

<sup>38</sup> Charles, *The Apocrypha*, pg.292

<sup>39</sup> The story of the Good Samaritan encompasses and illustrates what it means to love one’s neighbor.

<sup>40</sup> Perkins uses “whole” heart while Charles uses “all my” heart.

<sup>41</sup> Charles, *The Apocrypha*, pg.328,(Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs: The Testament of Issachar v.7:2-6)

These examples prove that the joining of the command to love God and to love one's neighbor existed before Jesus' time, but one should keep in mind that "though these examples do not reduce the whole law to the double commandment, they do give that commandment a prominent place at the end of a list of commandments. The position presents it as what holds them all together."<sup>42</sup> The idea that these were the beginning of what was to become Jesus' "Greatest Commandment" is highly probable<sup>43</sup>, and these two examples prove that the concept of love of God and love of neighbor did exist as a single concept before the time of Jesus. The meaning and power behind the "Greatest Commandment" relies directly on the importance that Jesus attributes to it, and while it can be concluded that it did exist, it was not the singular commandment that was not only inclusive of all men and women but also was the reduction of the whole Law and the prophets. "Sometimes Christians have the false idea that Christianity invented love, mercy and compassion. Of course, the Gospel stories never claim to."<sup>44</sup> The true radical act of Jesus was to make love of his fellow men and women<sup>45</sup> his most prominent message, not merely for ethical reasons but "as an answer to how one attained the salvation"<sup>46</sup> that he promised. By connecting love with salvation, Jesus radically changed the idea and beliefs of not only his time and place but for all places and time to come. We shall now move on to the Gospel of Mark, keeping in mind just how progressive Jesus' message of love of God and neighbor was when compared to the predominate attitudes and practices present at the time of Jesus, most notably the ritualistic laws that

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<sup>42</sup> Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament*, pg.17

<sup>43</sup> These texts were available in the geographical location and time of Jesus

<sup>44</sup> Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament*, pg.21

<sup>45</sup> The love that Jesus proclaimed is a relational love, where one must attempt to form some understanding of the other with love in one's heart.

<sup>46</sup> Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament*, pg.21



one was instructed to keep for the purpose of obedience to God, which where subordinate to one's love of God, but occupied a substantial part of Judaism.

## THE DOUBLE LOVE COMMAND IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK

In Mark 12:28-34 the reader learns that Jesus is asked a question by one of the scribes, a person who “belongs to the group consistently hostile to Jesus throughout Mark.”<sup>47</sup> The question is “Which commandment is above everything else.”<sup>48</sup> Here E. Boring points out that the translation should not say “first of all commandments,” but “first of everything” or “above all things” noting that the NAB, TEV, CEV, NIV among other construe the translation from “first” to “first of all commandments.”<sup>49</sup> The question that the scribe is asking is not simply which commandment is the first commandment, but which commandment is the greatest or most important commandment. In this scene the scribe is neither hostile nor trying to “trip him up... [and] is not sent by the Sanhedrin.”<sup>50</sup> This scribe is simply asking Jesus a question because “he regards Jesus as having given good answers to his critics, and asks a sincere question.”<sup>51</sup> Jesus' response is the combined command of love of God and love of neighbor that is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18. Only in Mark does the reader find Deuteronomy 6:4 being quoted, which the authors of Matthew and Luke leave out. “The Markan Jesus cites the text in roughly its LXX form, but with two modifications: (1) for the LXX's *dynamis* ('strength', 'power') Mark has the synonym *ischyos*, 'strength.' *Dynamis* is an important

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<sup>47</sup> M. Eugene Boring, *Mark: a commentary*, pg.342

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, pg.342 (Mark 12:28)

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

theological term for Mark, even used as a name for God, but never used for human power. (2) To the biblical ‘heart, soul and strength’ Mark adds a fourth: ‘mind’ (*dianoia*).”<sup>52</sup> These two changes are relatively small, but according to Boring these changes reflect the reasonableness of Jewish faith present in Hellenistic Judaism and used as part of “its missionary outreach to thoughtful Gentiles, many of whom were attracted by the high ethics and monotheism of the Jewish community- both of which are also emphasized in this scene.”<sup>53</sup> Perkins believes that Mark’s version of the story had been eventually used by Christians to preach to the Gentiles. She believes that unlike teaching Jews only Gentiles would require to be taught to worship the one true God, citing 1 Thes 1:9f.<sup>54</sup> From this evidence it is clear that the author of Mark was also speaking to Gentiles, and in doing so how would that audience understand what was meant when referring to neighbor? Boring believes that “while in its biblical context ‘neighbor’ had originally referred to one’s fellow Israelite, but by the first century it was widely understood to refer to human beings as such.”<sup>55</sup> If “neighbor” referred to any person on earth, then the inclusiveness of this command is wide reaching and all encompassing. Boring notes that Jesus would not oppose a presumed “narrow Judaism” but did understand the term “neighbor” in an inclusive way.<sup>56</sup> Dissecting the double love command that Jesus teaches to the scribe in no way takes away from the radicalness of it, even though it is only the joining of two OT sayings because it had not yet been elevated to the importance that Jesus Christ had. “Though they remain two commands they are inseparable; love of God cannot exist without love for all fellow human beings as its

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<sup>52</sup> Boring, *Mark: a commentary*, pg.344

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pg.344

<sup>54</sup> Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament*, pg.23

<sup>55</sup> Boring, *Mark: a commentary*, pg.345

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pg.345

content. Love of humanity cannot exist without love of God as its bases.”<sup>57</sup> Essentially one completes the other; one cannot truly love God without manifesting a love for all things He created; and love of neighbor cannot exist unless one first learns to love God. The radicalness of this message is in the expression of one’s love for not only God but also all things He created, making love of neighbor merely an outward expression of one’s love for God. “Thus, the story explains how Christians can worship the true God and stand in the Old Testament tradition without continuing to follow the ritual and cultic obligations of the law.”<sup>58</sup> By following the summary of the Law, that is the double love command, one will still be in communion with God as well as following the law of the Old Testament, though not necessarily the ritualistic laws of Judaism. It also stands as the final public answer Jesus gives about his teachings in Mark as well as representing part of the final silencing of the Jews.<sup>59</sup> Boring believes that at this point in the Gospel the insertion of this story makes five particularly Markan points. A missionary point, namely that Jesus’ teaching is in continuity with the “best of biblical thought.”<sup>60</sup> The message to love God and one’s neighbor is the basis of many of the Old Testament commands, Jesus directly commands to love God and one’s neighbor, bypassing the need for so many commands and laws that were ritualistic and cultic. A narrative and historical point in the context of the temple’s destruction, which is now not crucial to worship and the “command to love God and neighbor is central, and can thus do without the sacrificial apparatus of the temple.”<sup>61</sup> These two love commands can be seen as a theological point regarding the uniqueness of God, especially when Mark references the

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<sup>57</sup> Boring, *Mark: a commentary*, pg.345

<sup>58</sup> Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament*, pg.24

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, pg.24

<sup>60</sup> Boring, *Mark: a commentary*, pg.346

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pg.346

one true God. The repeated emphasis on the “one God” is peculiar to Mark, not picked up by either Matthew or Luke in their versions of the story.”<sup>62</sup> A Christological point regarding the authority of Jesus happens when he silences all of his critiques. The final ethical point made by Jesus is when He states that what is right is defined by the will of God “made known by revelation, and that ethics is obedience to this command, not adherence to an ideal or principle.”<sup>63</sup> “Like the Old Testament and Judaism, the Markan Jesus teaches no ethics as such, but response in faith and love to the act of God.”<sup>64</sup> Loving God with one’s entire being is to also love everything that He created, most obviously His greatest creation, humans. By adhering to the command to love God and neighbor one is following the all-encompassing ethical commands that reach far beyond just ethics, they reach into the spiritual as well by ensuring a right relationship not only with God, but also with all of humankind. In the spirit of the Markan Jesus it is clear that the double love command is not “a sectarian ethic focused only on insiders, but makes sense to those who affirm the ethics of Judaism, and the scope of the Markan neighborhood extends beyond the Christian community”<sup>65</sup> to the entire world.

## **THE DOUBLE LOVE COMMAND IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**

In Luke 10:25-28 the episode initially “seems to resemble Mark 12:28-31 in that in Mark, Matthew and Luke someone questions Jesus and two verses from the OT

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<sup>62</sup> Boring, *Mark: a commentary*, pg.346

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., pg.347

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., pg.347

(Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18) are joined in an answer.”<sup>66</sup> This scene begins by a lawyer first asking Jesus “what am I to do to inherit eternal life?”<sup>67</sup> Jesus responds in turn with a question asking the lawyer, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?”<sup>68</sup> The lawyer answers the question with the double love command by joining two verses from the OT, Deuteronomy 6:5, which is taken directly from the LXX except for the addition of “and with all your mind,” and Leviticus 19:18, to which Jesus responds with an affirmative, “You have answered correctly; do this and you shall live.” The meaning that Jesus attaches to the command, namely eternal life, elevates the command beyond merely a summary of the Law to a command that is foundational if one wants to be in communion with God. The true radicalness of the double love command is not in the combining of two commands, but the elevation of those commands as a way to obtain eternal life. Fitzmyer believes that with this answer the story becomes a “controversy dialogue” with Jesus’ final comment being a “weak pronouncement, and the cutting edge in the episode is rather the lawyer’s answer.”<sup>69</sup> Here I must disagree with Fitzmyer and once again note that while the double love command had been combined in the past, it was only Jesus who elevated the double love command as a command to follow if one wants not only eternal life but also to be in a loving relationship with God. Perkins agrees, and believes that while in the other two Gospels the double love command could be seen as a summary of the Law, here the author is not interested in summarizing the Law and goes so far as to change the question so that it focuses on how to obtain

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<sup>66</sup> Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke*, pg.877

<sup>67</sup> Luke 10:25

<sup>68</sup> Luke 10:26

<sup>69</sup> Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke*, pg.878

salvation, and presumably the need to change the structure of the question.<sup>70</sup> If the larger context of this passage is examined, the reader “will see that [the author of Luke] is using this incident to serve as a frame for the parable of the Good Samaritan.”<sup>71</sup> From the fact that the author chooses to have the lawyer and not Jesus proclaim the double love command, it becomes obvious that the command is being used differently than in the other two Gospels. Fitzmyer believes that a further question by the lawyer, “But who is my neighbor?”<sup>72</sup> closely connects this episode with the following story of the Good Samaritan.<sup>73</sup> The idea that the author of Luke adopted this scene from his “inherited story” to be used as an introduction to the story of the Good Samaritan is only bolstered by the fact that the lawyer’s initial question is “echoed in Luke 18:18, posed by a ‘magistrate,’ which introduces a different story about the commandments of the Decalogue.”<sup>74</sup> Fitzmyer believes that any initial similarities between the Marcan and Lucan episodes “soon gives way to the impression that one may be dealing with different traditions or perhaps different incidents in the life of Jesus.”<sup>75</sup> Fitzmyer also agrees with Perkins in regard to the idea that the author of Luke in all probability adapted this episode by making it an introduction to the parable of the Good Samaritan. But what does the author mean when he uses the word “neighbor?” “Jesus’ parabolic definition of ‘neighbor’ belongs to the Lucan teaching on what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. He has formulated that teaching in terms familiar to Hellenistic readers; the neighbor is one who shows ‘mercy.’ Hellenistic Jewish texts commonly use ‘mercy’ for ‘love’ in

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<sup>70</sup> Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament*, pg.23

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., pg.22

<sup>72</sup> Luke 10:29

<sup>73</sup> Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke*, pg.877

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

speaking about relations with the neighbor.”<sup>76</sup> According to Fitzmyer the author of Luke quotes from the LXX Leviticus 19:18 verbatim and “neighbor’ stands in parallelism with ‘the children of your own people,’ i.e. fellow Israelites... and is eventually extended in Leviticus 19:34 to the ‘sojourner.’”<sup>77</sup> Yet if the reader is to believe that the author of Luke used this parenthesis as an introduction to the parable of the Good Samaritan, the meaning of neighbor is clear, it is all men and women who are in need of our love or mercy, including one’s enemy. Above all else the reader of Luke must keep in mind that the author of Luke was writing for a mostly Gentile audience and therefore tailored not only his stories and parables but also his entire Gospel for his assumed Gentile audience. The reality in which Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 are viewed also add to the reader’s understanding of the double love command not only in Luke but in Mark and Matthew as well. Fitzmyer believes that “whether one can establish the preexistence of the double command in prior Jewish tradition or not, it is presented as a ‘reading’ of the ‘Law.’ In effect, the Lucan Jesus finds the basic counsel of Christian life in the words of Scripture itself.”<sup>78</sup> Namely “Do this and you shall live,” or do this and you shall be granted eternal life. “Only the person who puts the command of love into practice will find life. The verb *zêsê* may allude to Leviticus 18:5, which promises life to the person who obeys Yahweh’s statutes and ordinances, and the totality of those laws as evidenced in the love of one’s neighbor. Jesus’ words thus add a counsel of practice to the theoretic recognition of the love-commands in the Torah.”<sup>79</sup> For the author of Luke these “love-commands” addressed to the Christian reader form a part of the Lucan parenthesis and

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<sup>76</sup> Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament*, pg.23

<sup>77</sup> Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke*, pg.880

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pg.879

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pg.879

should inspire praxis if one wants to inherit eternal life and be in communion with God. The connected command of love of God and neighbor can only find expression by following both, each depending on the other to express a full expression of a person's love for God as well as love for all that God created, which leads to the command to love one's neighbor. Despite the fact that Jesus was the first person to elevate and combine these two commands not as a summary of the Law<sup>80</sup>, but as the path to salvation, and the authors of the Synoptic Gospels were the first to record them, once they were combined and elevated they became inseparable. But what is the reader to make of the fact that the command did not come from the mouth of Jesus but from a scholar? Should the reader understand this to mean that every follower of Jesus intrinsically knows in his or her heart that this is the Greatest Command, or perhaps a more realistic understanding would be that the command to love God and neighbor was somewhat common during the time and place of Jesus, but only He equated the double love command with salvation? Or should the reader understand this to be simply the author attributing a saying of Jesus to another, to clarify that if one does this he or she will attain salvation? Or should one understand this as the author explaining how one should understand the term "neighbor", as well as using it as an introduction to a parable? Perhaps all these reasons are credible and the reader should understand that while in this Gospel the command does not come from Jesus' lips, He does confirm the answer and assures the scholar that if he does this he would receive eternal life and thus elevated the double love command beyond a summary of the Law and toward a path to salvation as well as a way to orient one's life toward God.

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<sup>80</sup> There is clear evidence that the combination of the commands to love God and neighbor as the summary of the law was present during the time and place of Jesus most notably being taught by Hillel.



## THE DOUBLE LOVE COMMAND IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

“In contrast to Luke, Matthew is very much interested in the question of Jesus’ relationship to the law.”<sup>81</sup> Overall, the Gospel of Matthew was written for a Jewish Christian audience and therefore it should come as no surprise that the author of Matthew fashions his interpretation of Jesus’ two love commands, the “Greatest Commandment,” into something his audience would understand. In Matthew’s story the reader once again finds Jesus being asked what the greatest commandment is, but answers with two commands that are inextricable. Looking at Philo’s idea that “the two halves of the Decalogue, halves which concern love of God and neighbor, are incomplete in themselves” is to realize that perhaps they intrinsically belong together.<sup>82</sup> How does the author of Matthew understand the term neighbor? In the Gospel of Matthew it is clear that the author intends to denote everyone is one’s neighbor, since in Matthew 5:43-48 Jesus commands his followers to love even their enemies, expanding the understanding of the term neighbor to all humans who inhabit the earth, even one’s enemies. Contrary to this thinking is the evidence of the eschatological commands of Jesus,<sup>83</sup> which is premised on the reality of “the end of times” and thus is exclusive of “pagans” and “Samaritans,” and intent on saving “the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”<sup>84</sup> One should understand that this dictate from Jesus was not to exclude “pagans” and “Samaritans” from his message of love, but since the end was believed to be eminent, one’s energies

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<sup>81</sup> Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament*, pg.23

<sup>82</sup> Davies and Allison, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, pg.243

<sup>83</sup> See Matthew 10:5-7

<sup>84</sup> Matthew 10:5-6

should be focused only on the group that would be most receptive to his message, and thus has no impact on who Jesus considers one's neighbor.

Davies is quick to point out that while Jesus is asked for "the greatest commandment" and responds with two, the second is "purely numerical, that is, second in the order given but not second in importance."<sup>85</sup> To understand that a summary of the Law could not have one command more important than the other, and as stated before, once the two were linked together they became inseparable, both in importance and as an ethical command. "Love of God, like neighbor, is not firstly an attitude or affection but- as the example of Jesus shows- a way of life, the sweat of labour for Another, 'the free service of our wills' (Calvin). This is why, unlike an emotion it can be commanded, and why as Tertullian wrote, it is visible."<sup>86</sup> To understand that the author of Matthew did not intend to condense the Torah into one commandment is to understand that Matthew was writing for a Jewish Christian audience. "[Matthew] has reformulated the tradition in 22:40 to make it clear that what is involved in the Christian principle of interpreting the law. Matthew wants to make it clear that the Christian interpretation of the law, based on Jesus' eschatological fulfillment of the law, is represented in the whole law."<sup>87</sup> Davies believes that the double command to love "is not a principle from which all of the law's commands can be deduced, nor does it replace the Torah, nor is it the hermeneutical key to interpreting the law or for determining the validity or importance of different commandments. Rather it is simply the most basic or important demand of the law, a

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<sup>85</sup> Davies and Allison, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, pg.243

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., pg.241

<sup>87</sup> Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament*, pg.23

demand which in no way replaces the Torah but instead states its true end.”<sup>88</sup> Matthew 5:17 explicitly states that Jesus did not come to abolish the “Law of the Prophets” but to fulfill it. For the author of Matthew the Law is perhaps the most important aspect of the Jewish faith and to do away with that part of the faith would be unthinkable, both ethically and spiritually. For the author of Matthew it is very clear that his preexisting Jewish faith is an integral part of his Christian faith, very much the same way that Jesus’ faith is portrayed. The “Greatest Commandment” or the double love command in Matthew should be seen as a fulfillment of the Law and the Torah, a commandment that is at the core of a Christian’s faith, which the “whole law and the prophets depend on.”<sup>89</sup> “Matthew’s text, in other words, postulates that the Torah is in harmony with itself: its twin commandments to love God and neighbor are at one with its other commandments; and the suspension of the law and prophets on the commandments to love simply means that all imperatives are to be performed for the sake of God and neighbor.”<sup>90</sup> Ultimately Davies believes that love is the prevailing force that unites and protects the virtues, ethically for the author of Matthew it should be seen as the unifying force of the Law.

## **THE DOUBLE LOVE COMMAND IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS**

As stated before, the differences between the double love commands in the Synoptic Gospels are significant. I would simply like to point out the most important differences here, and in no way hope to highlight all of them. Luke stands out because it

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<sup>88</sup> Davies and Allison, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, pg.247

<sup>89</sup> Matthew 22:40

<sup>90</sup> Davies and Allison, *A critical and exegetical commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, pg.246

is the only Gospel that connects eternal life with the following of this commandment, to love God and neighbor. When Jesus states, “do this and you will live,”<sup>91</sup> he transforms the commands beyond a summary of the Law and into a commandment that, if followed, will lead to eternal life. True to the Markan Jesus the benefit of following His love command is the reward of the Kingdom, and everything that that entails. One could argue that the rewards of the Kingdom include eternal life, but no overt mention is made and therefore should not be claimed. While Matthew does not offer any “rewards” theologically he builds on the Torah and subsequently the entire Jewish faith by not simply synthesizing the two commands but by merging them together to form an all-encompassing and foundational commandment that all Christians should live by. To synthesize the Synoptic Gospels into one coherent idea would be to state that above all else a Christian must love the one true God with his total being and love his or her neighbor as God has loved him or her, and in doing this one will fulfill the most fundamental commands placed upon Jesus’ lips.

Does a singular coherent command emerge from the three Synoptic Gospels? I believe that it does. Each author adds meaning and understanding to the core message of love of God and neighbor. The core message is a relational love that one must have not only for one’s fellow humans but also for God as well, a love that will enable salvation in the future and a fulfillment in the present. Relational love starts out much like other love, but to fully realize its full potential one must not only give their love to them, they must also receive the love of the other as well as building a loving relationship with them. One aspect of the relational love that I am describing mandates that one cannot fully love another unless one is committed to building a loving relationship with them, and only

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<sup>91</sup> Luke 11:28

then can one realize the full capacity of love that is described in the Synoptic Gospels. To know the love of God, one must be compelled to act with that love in his or her heart, which will manifest itself in acts of charity and as well as justice for all humans on earth. Each Gospel expands the meaning and far reaching ethical implications that are contained within the “Greatest Commandment.” Luke expands the understanding of what will be accomplished if this command is followed, namely eternal life, while Mark shows the reader how the complete devotion to the one true God can result in the action to love one’s neighbor. Matthew builds on the Jewish faith showing the reader the “evolution” of the summary of the Law into the double love command as a pathway towards salvation. Combined, they result in the “Greatest Commandment,” a commandment that must be the basis for all other commands, and if followed will bring a person into a loving relationship with not only God but also all of humankind.

### **THE DOUBLE LOVE COMMAND IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN**

The Gospel of John clearly does not appropriate and combine the sayings from Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18 to form a new commandment, yet the “Greatest” or “New” commandment in John reimagines what it means to love God/Jesus and one’s neighbor. How does the Gospel of John manage to reimagine and reconstruct the double love command? To answer this question we will first examine the text to establish the intended meaning of the author and then examine the commandment in the context of the community who it was written for. The first instance of the love command in the Gospel of John is as follows:

I am giving you a new commandment:

Love one another. As I have loved you, so you too must love one another.

By this will all identify you as my Disciples- by the love you have for one another.<sup>92</sup>

The author of John writes that it is a “New Commandment” and yet it encompasses the totality of the “Greatest Commandment” found in the Synoptic Gospels. As stated before, the actions of loving God is to love all of His creation, and thus one’s fellow man. The love God shows humans, who are His greatest creation, is quantified and revealed into the love that Jesus showed His disciples, concretely showing just how much God and his Son love the human race. The command to “love one another” could just have easily been restated as “love your neighbor,” but it is clear that the command to “love one another” refers exclusively to the Disciples of Jesus, lacking any universal message of love in this context. Brown writes, “this clause [love one another] is preceded by *hina* which we have translated epexegetically so that ‘Love one another’ constitutes the commandment.”<sup>93</sup> With this understanding it becomes clear that the rest of the discourse is explanatory in nature, only adding to the ultimate meaning of the command to “love one another.” This also begins to answer the question of how Jesus expects them to love one another. Brown points out that that the author of John always uses the verb *agapan*<sup>94</sup> when referring to the “love that should exist among the disciples of Jesus.”<sup>95</sup> When Jesus begins His explanation He say’s “as I have loved you,” which Brown writes is “in the context of ‘the hour’ [showing] Jesus’ demonstrable love [which] includes the laying

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<sup>92</sup> John 14:34-35

<sup>93</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John: Introduction, translation, and notes*, pg.607

<sup>94</sup> The meaning of *agape* is that of an unselfish love of one person for another or brotherly love.

<sup>95</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, pg.607

down of his life and taking it up again.”<sup>96</sup> Here we gain an insight into the kind of love that Jesus is commanding his disciples to follow, namely a love exists between a parent and a child, or a love one has for his or her fellow disciples in which everything is shared with the other and nothing is “too much to ask.” When Jesus states, “So you too must love,” Brown explains that this is the *hina* clause, and some interpreters would give it full final force: ‘I have loved you in order that you also love one another.’<sup>97</sup> Now the reader should grasp the full impact of this powerful statement, which is made clear to the reader. A disciple of Christ should love his or her community member with the same love that Jesus has for all people, a love that is so great that He is willing to lay down His life, out of love, for a fellow person. The reason this should be done, beyond salvation, is because Jesus loves this way. This commitment to stand with fellow humans out of love to the point of endangering one’s own life should be seen as an ideal, demonstrated by Jesus, of the commitment to love and justice that Jesus commanded of his followers. This completely original commandment elevates not only who one should love, but also what that love entails. This message of Jesus transforms the powerful message of the double love command into an even more powerful command to simply “love one another.” We will now examine the community in which such a radically powerful command developed and ultimately recorded by the author of the Gospel of John.

“Hellenistic Jewish wisdom traditions played an important role in the development of Johannine thought. They enabled Johannine Christians to picture Jesus as the divine Word. They also influenced Johannine interpretation of the love command

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<sup>96</sup> Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, pg.607

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

[Berger: 173]”<sup>98</sup> Perkins’ writes that Berger “sees the culmination of [the Hellenistic Jewish wisdom tradition to understand love of neighbor] in the Gospel of John.”<sup>99</sup> This culmination was only possible because the Johannine community understood the love command in the context of their own sectarian community, and also because through their love of neighbor they were also evangelizing to others, according to the commands of Jesus. It is no secret that the community that produced the Gospel of John viewed the world outside of their community as hostile and did disparage and condemn those who either left the community or chose never to join. Even though there are some disparaging remarks present in the Gospel of John<sup>100</sup> it should be viewed in the context of the time that it was written. “However, several qualifications should be introduced into this negative picture. Presentation of one’s opponents in demonic symbols was common among minority groups of the period. One should, perhaps, be more struck by the fact that the realized eschatology of the Johannine tradition left Christians without the imaginative outlet of fantasizing all the torments that the judgment might inflict on their opponents.”<sup>101</sup> I am by no means trying to “gloss over” the apparent lack of love toward one’s neighbor, specifically the Jews, but one must understand the context in which the author wrote this Gospel and by no means try to rationalize these negative comments, but one hopes that a reader of the Gospel of John will bring some understanding of the situation out of which the hostility flows. Also, one should understand that “despite the inner-directedness of the Johannine love language, the community never became an

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<sup>98</sup> Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament*, pg.104

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., pg.21

<sup>100</sup> See John 8:44 as but one example

<sup>101</sup> Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament*, pg.106



isolated, perfectionist sect like that at Qumran,<sup>102</sup> due to the fact that the Gospel of John ultimately spread to several other communities and was ultimately included into the canon, unlike the Qumran whose message never spread beyond their community.

The act of Jesus giving his followers a new “commandment” should not be viewed as a one dimensional command, but as a testament to the love embodied by Jesus Christ. Perkins argues that in the Fourth Gospel the love command is presented as a testament of the love of Jesus as well as the basis of three relationships. Perkins writes that it defines relationships between members of the community<sup>103</sup> and in turn those relationships are founded on the special relationship of presence that the community enjoys with God/Jesus and Spirit<sup>104</sup> while also being reflected in Jesus’ commissioning his follower to represent him before a hostile world<sup>105 106</sup>. The new commandment found in John should not be viewed simply as a command to love one another, but also as a statement to the relational qualities present in the Johannine community. By examining each of the three sections of this command a greater understanding of the “New Commandment” should be uncovered. “Since it is the only commandment in the Johannine tradition of ethical preaching as we have it recorded, we no longer find it as a summary or fulfillment of the law,<sup>107</sup> which is evident in the three Synoptic Gospels. Perkins believes that instead of being a summary or fulfillment of the Law the first section of the love commandment found in the Gospel of John “bears all the weight of

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<sup>102</sup> Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament*, pg.106

<sup>103</sup> Corresponding to the first section of the new commandment, “A new commandment I give to you that you love one another.”

<sup>104</sup> Corresponding to the second section of the new commandment, “even as I have loved you, you must also love one another.”

<sup>105</sup> Corresponding to the third and final section of the new commandment, “By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

<sup>106</sup> Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament*, pg.107

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

Christian ethical obligation.”<sup>108</sup> To be a disciple of Jesus one must first and foremost love his or her fellow human. In the context of the Gospel of John in all probability the author of this text meant other members of the community when referring to “one another” and not all people on earth, but evidenced in the life of Jesus an inclusiveness was a key characteristic of his teaching and preaching.<sup>109</sup> Also the love they have for one another shows others that they are Disciples of Christ.<sup>110</sup>

According to Perkins the second section of the new commandment concerns the “special relationship” that the community enjoyed with God/Jesus and Spirit. Essentially this section proclaims that loving Jesus means keeping his commandments. “Some exegetes think that it represents the Johannine tradition’s version of the double love command with love of Jesus replacing love of God.”<sup>111</sup> Or perhaps it is the highest manifestation of the double love command found in the Gospels. The ontology of God and Jesus is that they come from the same oneness,<sup>112</sup> making Jesus Christ an extension of God. To understand that the “New Commandment” is the highest manifestation of the double love command one must first understand that Jesus not only came from God but also embodies God’s love for humanity. Second one must recognize that instead of using Leviticus 19:18 the commandment in John simply commands that you should love one another (your fellow disciple, fellow community member, or neighbor) as Jesus has loved you. And since Johannine community members could access concrete ways in which Jesus loved them, and therefore negated the reason to clarify that one must love God with all his or her heart, being, strength and mind, the Johannine command is clearer while

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<sup>108</sup> Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament*, pg.107

<sup>109</sup> See John 9:1 and 4:4

<sup>110</sup> John 13:35

<sup>111</sup> Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament*, pg.107

<sup>112</sup> At least in the Catholic Tradition

also being more direct and concrete. Lifted from its context the text that commands a member of the community to love one another is free from the connotations that are implied by using the word “neighbor”, once again making the meaning even more inclusive by stating to simply “love one another,” by broadening the scope to every person on earth. “This passage shows that the Johannine community sees that eschatological presence of God realized in itself,”<sup>113</sup> through the love and acts of Jesus Christ whom He sent as a gift to humankind. Perkins examines John 15:1-17 to clarify the extended meaning of the “New Commandment.” “The commentary on the vine image of vv1-6 opens up several dimensions of the role played by the love command in the Johannine community. The ‘abiding’ language in John always means to be a disciple of Jesus. Consequently, the passage encourages Christians not to give up under persecution (v 18). But Christians must glorify God by ‘bearing much fruit,’ apparently a reference to the fact that they will have to bear witness to Jesus before the hostile world.”<sup>114</sup> Thus, the community is being entrusted with continuing Jesus’ own mission; not only by bear witness but also through the love they have for each other.

“The Pauline emphasis on the *imitatio Christi* in the life of the suffering apostle finds its Johannine counterpart here as well. The obedience of the community to Jesus’ commandments is equivalent to Jesus’ perfect obedience to the Father.”<sup>115</sup> Jesus’ perfect obedience to God should be viewed as an ideal, something that humans should strive for everyday of our lives, but one should never expect to reach the perfection that Jesus possessed. “Though this section mentions commandments in the plural, the only commandment ever stated is the love commandment (similarly elsewhere in the

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<sup>113</sup> Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament*, pg.107

<sup>114</sup> Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament*, pg.109

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

Johannine tradition). The highest example and foundation of that love is Jesus' death for his friends, for- unlike the Pauline use of servant/slave metaphors- the Johannine disciples are now friends, not slaves."<sup>116</sup> And as friends the disciples are on equal ground with Jesus, essentially he has accepted them as equals, which should be seen as a testament of the love Jesus has for all humans. "In the Hellenistic Jewish traditions of the love command, we found the closest parallels to the double love command, love of God and neighbor, in the "testament" genre, that is, in writings or sections of writing which contained the final instructions of an Old Testament patriarch to his sons. Like those patriarchs, Jesus exhorts his disciples to unity and love."<sup>117</sup> Thus, the command to love one another is far more than an ethical command, it is also the way to attain salvation, and by doing so it is now given the weight and power that make this commandment more than a radically new command and transforms it into a divine command.

### **THE ESSENCE OF THE DOUBLE LOVE COMMAND**

The essence of the double love command is one that first and foremost must be relational, that in order to love one's neighbor one first must build a relationship with him or her. As noted before, the author of the Gospel of Luke understands the command to love God and neighbor as a path toward eternal life. The author of the Gospel of Mark conveys that if one wants to enter the Kingdom of God, one must follow the "Greatest Commandment." The author of the Gospel of Matthew, speaking to a mostly Jewish audience, reinforces the idea that these two commands encompass the "whole law and the prophets" excluding the ritualistic and cultic laws that have been misguidedly enforced

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<sup>116</sup> Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament*, pg.109

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, pg.105

by humans. The author of the Gospel of John takes the double love command and appropriates it for the audience he is writing for, and in doing so expands one's understanding of the command by concretely showing how powerful and evident God's love is for us through the love of Jesus Christ. The relational love evidenced in the acts of Jesus adds to one's understanding of the "Greatest/ New Commandment," expanding the meaning that was written in the Gospels beyond a summary of the Law into the source of salvation, eternal life, and most importantly a loving relationship with God. Yet what are the concrete actions of a person who is in a loving relationship with God? In the next section I will explore not only the concrete qualities of a loving relationship with God, but also look to the actions of Jesus, recorded in the four Gospels, as an example of One who has an ideal loving relationship with God. To name and identify the qualities of a loving relationship with not only God but also with all that God has created, I will deepen one's understanding of what it "looks" like if one follows the "Greatest/ New Commandment" that Jesus Christ imparted, and expected one to follow, to all of his disciples.

## Rediscovering tradition: Looking back to the early believers in Christ

Dr. Jeffrey Siker likes to say that reading the New Testament in Greek is like seeing it in color, whereas reading it in translation is like seeing it in black and white: one gets the point but misses a lot of the nuances.<sup>118</sup> Much is it in the same way when one

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<sup>118</sup> Besides saying this in Foundations of New Testament Theology class it is also cited by Bart D. Ehrman in Misquoting Jesus in the introduction note #1

tries to rediscover the teachings of Jesus available to modern day people, one can look to the modern Church and see it in black and white, or one could look to the early Christians (as well as the original Greek) and see it in color, discovering the recorded teachings and acts of Jesus Christ in their most uncorrupted form.<sup>119</sup> These early Christian communities offer a glimpse into people living out the teachings of Jesus at a time when the actions and teachings of Jesus were relatively contemporary as well as these communities having access to the most untainted or uncorrupted teaching of Jesus. I will attempt to “look back” into history and try to examine how the early Christians interpreted the command to love God and neighbor. The exact time I will examine will be after the crucifixion of Christ until Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire under Constantine in 313 AD, when it was no longer persecuted but severely corrupted by those in power, who in all reality could not live up to the commands of Jesus and still hold on to those positions of power, authority and wealth.<sup>120</sup> Albert Nolan writes:

Many millions throughout the ages have venerated the name of Jesus, but few have understood him and fewer still have tried to put into practice what he wanted to see done. His words have been twisted and turned to mean everything, anything and nothing. His name has been used and abused to justify crimes, to frighten children and to inspire men and women to heroic foolishness, Jesus has been more frequently honored and

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<sup>119</sup> It can be argued that all recorded history of Jesus’ teachings and actions have been at the very least influenced by the humans who recorded them, and since there is no objective historical account of Jesus’ actions, one should rely on the least corrupted recorded acts of Jesus. Subsequently, the recorded history closest to the time of Jesus would inevitable be the least corrupted by human actions and desires, but no recorded history of Jesus in the Gospels and by these early Christian communities are without some sort of human influence and therefore corrupted. Hence, no completely uncorrupted teachings exist, only accounts of Jesus that are less influenced by humans and changed for various reasons over time.

<sup>120</sup> Diana Butler Bass, *A People’s History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story*, pg.67.

worshipped for what he did not mean than for what he did mean. The supreme irony is that some of the things he opposed most strongly in the world of his time were resurrected, preached and spread more widely throughout the world- in his name.<sup>121</sup>

To connect with the true intentions of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels one must have love in his or her heart and rely on Jesus' actions as a basis for our own actions. How does one ascertain the true intentions of Jesus? For this paper we will look to the Gospels for this answer, but one must be careful not to confuse the Gospels with an objective account of history, but it is certainly the evidence Christians have of his teachings and life. Luke Timothy Johnson talks about the lack of "evidence and controls" that are required to conduct "genuine critical scholarship"<sup>122</sup> that would be needed to recover some version of the historical Jesus, but for this thesis we are only interested in the Jesus portrayed in the Gospels, and even more particular the Greatest Commandment that He imparts to his followers. Jesus gave his followers the Greatest /New Commandment, so that if one were to obey it in all aspects of his or her life the Word of Jesus would remain true to the intentions of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels. The double love command should be seen as a command to combat the attempts by those in power to corrupt the teaching of Jesus, and thus it was suppressed<sup>123</sup> for the better part of Christianity. One could argue that the double love command could be interpreted differently, but if one examines the actions and teaching as recorded in the Gospels it is hard to argue that for

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<sup>121</sup> Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity*, pg.5

<sup>122</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus*, pg.102

<sup>123</sup> One only has to examine the official teachings of the Church throughout history to come to the conclusion that the teachings of Jesus found in the Gospels differed greatly from that of the Church teachings. See Bass, pg.67-69 for a thorough examination of the beginning of the divergence of teachings of the Church from the Gospels.

the better part of history it was suppressed for the benefit of those in power to control those who were oppressed. To examine the early Christians of the past by utilizing historical objectivity should not be understood as “a reconstruction of the past in its unrepeatable factuality, it is the truth of the past in the light of the present.”<sup>124</sup> The impossibility of negating all that humanity has learned since the time of Jesus must be taken into account when examining the early Christian communities, to dismiss the scholarly research that exists in favor of simply stating the facts would be not only irrational but patently bad scholarship. According to Johnson, historical analysis is impossible for Jesus Christ due to lack of historical valid sources, but it is not impossible for many of the early Christian Communities from which many Gospel stories can be traced<sup>125</sup>.

I have already examined the Greek textual criticism of the Greatest /New Commandment and will now focus on the period after most of the Gospels were written, with the hope that these early Christians can inform our understanding of the command to love God and neighbor. Early Christians lived their life by the Greatest Commandment in a way that may be startling to present day Christians. The “*Didache* (ca. 100/120), an ancient Christian instruction manual, opens with these words: ‘There are two ways, one of life and one of death, but a great difference between the two ways. The way of life, then is this: First, you shall love God who made you, second you neighbor as yourself and do not do to another what you would not want done to you.’”<sup>126</sup> The idea that this commandment was the Greatest and most important not just for salvation but also

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<sup>124</sup> Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity*, pg.6

<sup>125</sup> Johnson, *The Real Jesus*, pg.102-103.

<sup>126</sup> Bass, *A People’s History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story*, pg.28-29. The *Didache* Ch.1:1-2 cited from <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-roberts.html>



because the early Christians recognized that this was how Jesus lived his own life was paramount to being a Christian as well as being part of the community. The *Didache*, or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles has been called the “most interesting specimen of early Christian literature [and] was discovered in 1875 and published in 1883.”<sup>127</sup> It should be noted that for the majority of the development of Christian doctrine this document had been unavailable, and while also containing first and foremost the Greatest Commandment it also contained directions on Baptism, the Eucharist as well as information on the ministry of the early Church.<sup>128</sup> Yet in light of all of the other subjects that are written about in the *Didache*, the manual placed the Greatest Commandment at the beginning of the document, making it the foundation for all else that followed. Subsequently, in the centuries’ to follow the notion to love God and neighbor had been skewed and buried by doctrine, customs and elaborate ceremonies, but by looking back to the early Christians we can rediscover and reconnect with the foundational and transformative commandment imparted to us by Jesus Christ as recorded in the Gospels. Bass professes that “more than anything else Christianity is a love song”<sup>129</sup> sung to all men and women by the one loving God. But one only has to understand how people inside the faith of Christianity view how churches are portraying their religion to understand that these churches do not teach the loving message of Jesus Christ. In David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons book *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity...And Why It Matters* they point to a recent survey where more than three-quarters of young churchgoers identified Christianity as judgmental, hypocritical, out of touch, insensitive, boring, and exclusive which can be viewed as the opposite of

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<sup>127</sup> J.W. Wand, *A History of the Early Church to A.D. 500*, pg.24.

<sup>128</sup> Wand, *A History of the Early Church to A.D. 500*, pg.25.

<sup>129</sup> Bass, *A People’s History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story*, pg.31.

love<sup>130</sup>. Only 16 percent of young adults outside the faith said that Christianity “consistently shows love for other people.”<sup>131</sup> According to this survey Christians are failing to not only live up to Jesus’ command in John 13:35, “This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another,” but also by the examples that Jesus lived his life by most notably his love for the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. Perhaps the commitment to live by Jesus’ command even if it meant persecution could serve as an example to present day Christians who should embrace loving God and neighbor as their top priority and not engage in the excessive consumer culture that will inevitably not only consume them but also their faith in Christ. The love of neighbor must first start with the love of God and self, as well as those around us, and spread outward, being mindful that while one must earn a living to provide for oneself and family, one must also understand that he or she does not need all of the accoutrements of modern life and that if one wants herself or himself to be more open to the love of God, then living simply, which is most notably a tenet of the Jesuit Volunteer Corp<sup>132</sup>, is the surest way to achieve such a state. And “while the [relatively few] martyrs provided the ultimate example of Jesus Christ like imitation, the everyday practice of imitating Jesus in making hard choices became the cornerstone for ordinary Christian life.”<sup>133</sup> The idea of becoming a martyr today is somewhat antiquated, but the message one should extract

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<sup>130</sup> David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian : what a new generation really thinks about Christianity... and why it matters*, pg.29-35.

<sup>131</sup> Kinnaman and Lyons, *Unchristian : what a new generation really thinks about Christianity... and why it matters*, pg. 28.

<sup>132</sup> According to the Jesuit Volunteer Corps website, Jesuit Volunteers commit to a simple lifestyle. This includes “spending a year centered less on money and the consumption promoted by the culture in the U.S. and can free volunteers to experience the value of simple pleasures, conversations, and their own creativity. Living simply is meant to help define a Christian lifestyle and can shape short- and long-term decisions about how to spend resources of time, talent and money.” (retrieved from <https://www.jesuitvolunteers.org/default.cfm?PID=1.25.10.3> on 3/1/2011)

<sup>133</sup> Bass, *A People’s History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story*, pg.35

from this is that one must have an unwavering commitment to the teachings of Christ as well as a love for God. Perhaps some of the hard choices that present day Christians must make are to sacrifice “things” for connecting and loving their neighbors.<sup>134</sup> The reality of Jesus’ teachings were that they liberated the poor and oppressed by His love for all of humanity, and by doing this, most notable Christians of early Christianity were persecuted for much the same reason that Jesus was crucified.

One notable Christian from that period was Origen, “a complex character, [who] inspired his students and infuriated his enemies. For him studying scripture and devotion in prayer were not two separate exercises. Rather, he practiced both at the same time in the form of biblical interpretation he both developed and employed: allegorical or spiritual, reading.”<sup>135</sup> For Origen the Word of Christ had many dimensions and layers, and while he wrote many commentaries on books of the Bible he also lived his life according to the Word. Origen engaged in such practices as almsgiving and visiting prisoners in jail but also never sought out power over people and for all of the love he gave the world he was, just a Jesus, killed around 251 CE.<sup>136</sup> If a person was to logically examine the message of liberation contained in the martyrdom of Jesus Christ as well as Origen and is embodied in the command to love God and neighbor the only conclusion that one could reasonably reach is that to faithfully follow this command one would have

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<sup>134</sup> In the most prosperous country in the world, the USA, very few people fail to have their basic needs met (food, shelter, clothing), yet very few have their need of being loved met, which speaks to the intense need to reexamine one’s priorities and reorient one’s self toward loving God and neighbor.

<sup>135</sup> Bass, *A People’s History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story*, pg. 43.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

to personally love one's neighbor in spite of the system of oppression that existed at the time of the early Christians, and still very much exists to this day.<sup>137</sup>

The idea of liberation is somewhat foreign to the life of Jesus Christ who preached an eschatological message and a need to reorient one's self toward God, and yet contained in this message of impending judgment there is a message of liberation located in the coming of the Kingdom of God. One only has to look at the parable of the worker in the vineyard in Matthew to locate the message of liberation that concludes with "Thus, the last will be first, and the first will be last."<sup>138</sup> The liberating message in the previous passage is that in the eyes of God those who have been oppressed by sexism, bigotry, and racism will be the first to enter the Kingdom of God, and the justice that these people so eagerly sought on earth will finally be granted to them. To only proclaim the love of God without living out that love would reduce one's message to a hollow shell, and thus to proclaim the love of God as well as His coming Kingdom it is imperative to abide by the command to love one's neighbor including advocating and assisting in liberating that neighbor from the oppression and poverty that may afflict him or her and most of all loving them as an equal. Chilton and McDonald describe "the praxis of the kingdom": the reversal of worldly values and a new lifestyle of service, servanthood and humility; receiving the yoke of the kingdom in childlike fashion; and sacrificing human reliance on worldly support-systems. The one who enters the kingdom is healed from blindness and follows Jesus' way with faith-perception, seeking justice and surrendering false values such as wealth, status-seeking and power. 'The focus of the new obedience is found in

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<sup>137</sup> Early Christians saw the political order as something set up by God, which is very different from how modern people view oppressive totalitarian governments and monarchs. It is interesting to note that the Catholic Church is one of the last theocratic monarchs.

<sup>138</sup> Matthew 20:16

the twin commandment to love.”<sup>139</sup> Yet one need not wait for the arrival of the Kingdom of God to practice these principles here on earth. To embrace these Kingdom principles is to follow the command to love God and neighbor. For the modern Christian this means that one should always act with a love of God in his or her heart, and always try to think about how one’s action will affect his or her neighbors. By not actively seeking wealth and power one will have the time and focus to actively build relationships with her or his neighbor, which is paramount to loving one’s neighbor.

First I would like to examine two early Christians who not only embody the Word of God but also lived the praxis of love. “In 203AD, Roman authorities arrested Vibia Perpetua, a North African believer and a young mother of good family, for being a Christian.”<sup>140</sup> This young mother, who did not seek martyrdom, “welcomed her impending death as a sign of her faithfulness to Christ.”<sup>141</sup> I can only wonder just how many modern day Christians would accept death as a consequence for standing up for their beliefs in Christ. The idea that life, while of great importance, is not the most valued substance one can possess, faithfulness to God and to the teachings of Jesus Christ are the ultimate substances that will not only bring one immense happiness but also eternal life. Bass writes:

Although Perpetua’s family worked for her release, the noblewoman refused to leave jail. Her prison diary, one of the few published works by an ancient Christian woman, recounts her struggle between her love for her father, her desire to raise her son, and her loyalty to Christ.

Empowered by visions of paradise, she chose the path of martyrdom. “I

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<sup>139</sup> Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom ethics: following Jesus in contemporary context*, pg.21.

<sup>140</sup> Bass, *A People’s History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story*, pg.32.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

thank God,” she said to an angel in a dream, “for although I was happy on earth, I am much happier here right now.”<sup>142</sup>

To understand that by following the command to love God and neighbor one discovers the path to true happiness, which is just another benefit of living by the Greatest Commandment that Jesus imparted to his followers. Perhaps the people of today cannot imagine giving up all of their possessions in favor of following God, but most of the people who inhabited the world of early Christianity probably could not either. Vibia Perpetua stands as another testament beside Jesus Christ, the ultimate testament, to the reality that believing in Jesus Christ is not an easy endeavor, but just as with most difficult endeavors, the rewards are tremendous, and in the model that Jesus Christ imparted to us, one must be willing to die for his or her beliefs in Jesus Christ and what he taught just as Vibia Perpetua had done. The fortitude of Vibia Perpetua to stand for her belief in Christ should serve a testament to modern day Christians. It shows that one must make hard decisions everyday if one desires to follow the Greatest Commandment. While Christians are no longer persecuted, it could be argued that modern day Christians face equally difficult decisions that definitely make life more challenging and by following Jesus Christ one will commonly find one’s self outside the mainstream of society. By orienting one’s life to loving one’s neighbor, and failing to keep up on the latest fashion craze, or buying the latest car, watching the latest television program or even spending time and money on one’s house will qualify someone as being out of touch with mainstream America.

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<sup>142</sup> Bass, *A People’s History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story*, pg.33.

Another truly remarkable Christian is St. Martin who converted to following the way of Christ when he was a soldier. The well-known story is as follows:

One day his regiment was guarding the city of Amiens, and he met a naked beggar on the road. Martin, though only a catechumen and not yet baptized a Christian, took off his cloak, tore it in half, and covered the beggar. He literally followed Jesus' teaching to give one's coat to the poor. The night following the incident on the road, Jesus appeared to Martin in a dream, affirming the soldier's act of hospitality, saying, "Martin, a simple catechumen covered me with this garment."<sup>143</sup>

The act of Martin clothing the naked man may have been a small act of charity for the soldier, but it also exemplified the command to love God and neighbor. Martin had shown his love for God by helping the creation of God as well as his neighbor and fellow human being. Not only did Martin live out the teaching of Jesus in small ways, he also personified the Greatest Commandment by no longer being a part of the Roman army. "When he was baptized, Martin demonstrated yet another early Christian practice by asking to be released from the army. 'I am Christ's soldier,' he maintained; 'I am not allowed to fight.'"<sup>144</sup> The act of denouncing death and destruction, a soldier's job, is not as revolutionary as one may think, "[Martin] was merely stating early Christian practice."<sup>145</sup> The belief that war meant killing and killing was murder, the antithesis of love, and murder was wrong was the foundation of this early Christian belief.<sup>146</sup> The eminent Dr. Lisa Sowle Cahill writes, "The Christian fathers of the first three centuries

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<sup>143</sup> Bass, *A People's History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story*, pg.70.

<sup>144</sup> Bass, *A People's History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story*, pg.71. Cited from *Christianity a Global History* by David Chidester

<sup>145</sup> Bass, *A People's History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story*, pg.71.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

were generally adamant that discipleship requires close adherence to the nonviolent and countercultural example of Jesus' own life and his sayings about the nature of the kingdom."<sup>147</sup> These two people embodied the Greatest Commandment as taught by Jesus Christ and found in the three Synoptic Gospels as well as the New Commandment found in the Gospel of John in such a way that not only have their stories survived, but they have become an illustration of how one should follow the teachings of Jesus Christ. Later in this thesis I shall examine all of the different qualities one must possess when one loves his or her neighbor. But first I will examine the first part of the Greatest Commandment, to love the one true God above all else, a seemingly simple command on the surface, but one that has profound implications when examined in detail. For a comprehensive understanding we will look not only to the early Christians but also to modern day theologians and spiritual thinkers.

## LOVE OF GOD

To love God means that one must love all of His creations. And what did God create? Everything! His greatest creation was that of the human race, elucidated in *Imago Dei*, and all Christians must realize that if one is serious about loving God, one must begin by loving all people, no matter race, or nationality or religion or sexual orientation. To faithfully live out the command to love God one must also love one's neighbor. When one loves' his or her neighbor, it should be understood as a concrete manifestation of one's love for God, making the two inextricable connected. How will one know how to love God? Through prayer, education and following Jesus' example.

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<sup>147</sup> Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism and Just War Theory*, pg. 41.



“Come follow me was intimately bound up with the practice of prayer. For prayer connects us with love. Prayer is much more than a technique, and early Christians left us no definitive how-to-manual on prayer. Rather, the desert fathers and mothers believed that prayer was a disposition of wholeness, so that ‘prayer and our life must be all of a piece.’ They approached prayer, as early church scholar Roberta Bondi notes, as a practical twofold process: first, of ‘thinking and reflecting,’ or ‘pondering’ what it means to *love others*; and second, as the ‘development and practice of loving ways of being.’ In other words, these ancients taught that prayer was participation in *God’s love*, the activity that takes us out of ourselves, away from the familiar, and conforms us to the path of Christ.”<sup>148</sup>

To actually know God, one must “think and reflect” on what is written in the Bible, the authoritative Word of God, and in doing so one begins to understand the power and glory of God. When one reflects on the Word of God it should be with the disposition of informing one’s “practice of loving ways of being.”<sup>149</sup> One must commit to not only a study of the Bible but also one must equally “ponder” what message God is trying to relate to all of humankind while viewing the Word through the lens of love. Without a minimal foundation of knowledge about the word of God one cannot be expected to “develop and practice loving ways of being.”<sup>150</sup> Only through praxis can one truly know God, and for one to have the correct actions one must know the Word of God and above all else His love for humanity. When one knows the Word of God, and I am not implying that one memorize the Bible, for even children can accomplish that, one can truly love God. What I am talking about is serious study, reflection as well as examining

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<sup>148</sup> Bass, *A People’s History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story*, pg.48.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

how theologians have understood the Word of God as well as taking the Word of God and implementing into every aspect of one's life. Make no mistake, one can spend a lifetime trying to fully comprehend the Word of God, but making it one's priority to understand each and every lesson or piece of wisdom gained will only better inform one's understanding of how God wants all humans to act not only toward each other but toward all of His creations. Without a strong foundation of knowledge about the Word of God one can never hope to understand the full ramifications of the Greatest/New Commandment that Jesus Christ imparted to his disciples and eventually to us, his present day disciples. Irenaeus articulates the love of God beautifully when he writes:

The glory of God is the human person fully alive; and life consists in beholding God. For if the vision of God which made by means of creation, gives life to all living in the earth, much more does that revelation of the Father which comes through the Word, give life to those who see God<sup>151</sup>

Irenaeus asserts that the glory or love of God manifests itself in all that exists on earth allowing for all people to observe and bear witness to His love for them. This vision of "love of God" is a "life-affirming, universal vision of God's cosmic love where everything is sacred."<sup>152</sup> For if a person looks at all life and all the world as the creation of God, and recognizes the beauty and wonder of this creation as well as the immense love it took to create, one will be taking a step toward understanding how one is to love God, as well as how God loves us, His creation. People must recognize that God's love and His gift of salvation should be understood in the context of this world and not viewed

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<sup>151</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 4.20.7, Bass, pg.39

<sup>152</sup> Bass, *A People's History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story*, pg.40.

as something that is outside of us or our surroundings but fundamentally part of not only us but the world in which we exist, because God is a part of this reality just as all humans are part of this world.<sup>153</sup> The love that God imparts to humanity through Jesus must in all aspects strive to promote and inform just how radical God's love is for us. To be willing to allow one's son to knowingly face such hardship and difficulties, to say nothing of the gruesome death Jesus faced, shows humans the totality of God's love for the human race. Once again the parable of the laborers in the vineyard<sup>154</sup> shows humanity that all systems that lack love cannot be the will of God, and through the teaching of Jesus Christ humanity learns that only if one loves God and neighbor can a person truly follow God. Love should govern all aspects of a Christian's life and be the guiding principle of all human actions.<sup>155</sup> In the parable of the laborers there are workers "who have done 'a heavy day's work in all the heat' [and] complain because others have received the same wages for working only one hour. It seems to be so unfair and unjust, if fact, so unethical."<sup>156</sup> By telling this parable Jesus is trying to illustrate how fairness and love can sometimes be at odds with each other, and if one is to live by the commandment of Jesus Christ love should always be the greatest guiding principle.

Nolan is quick to point out that the actions of the employer are neither unfair, unjust nor unethical. He writes:

One denarius is a just wage for a day's work and that is what they had agreed upon. But the employer, like God, had been moved with compassion for the many unemployed he found in the market place, and out of a genuine concern for

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<sup>153</sup> Bass, *A People's History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story*, pg.39.

<sup>154</sup> Matthew 20:1-5

<sup>155</sup> Love can manifest itself in actions of charity, justice and communalism to name but a few.

<sup>156</sup> Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity*, pg.119.

them and their families he had employed them for the rest of the day and paid them a wage which was not proportionate to the work done but proportionate to their needs and the needs of their families.<sup>157</sup>

This illustrates God's loving graciousness beyond all measure, which subscribes not to some notion of fairness but a deeply relational love in which the needs of the person are taken into account. "Those who had worked all day do not share the employer's compassion for the others and therefore they complain. Their 'justice,' like the justice of the Zealots and Pharisees, is loveless. They envy compassion and generosity toward others,"<sup>158</sup> and fail to focus on all of the blessings that they have received in their own life. No man or woman can claim to be perfect, and therefore all men and women must, if they are to call themselves Christians, begin to understand the radically new teaching that God imparts to us through Jesus. Objective fairness is an impossibility for humans, one can claim that a certain way is the fairest way to treat a particular situation, yet, when applied to a concrete problem that includes many different people, who come from different economic and social backgrounds the only way to be fair is to have the compassion of Jesus Christ and love each person according to his or her own needs, which may on the surface seem to be imparting an ethic of subjectivity, but in reality it allows each person to have his or her needs addressed in the most loving way humanly possible. Treating a person individually, with respect to his or her background and social standing, to name but a few, allows for a person to tailor his or her praxis of love so that one will take into account the infinite amount of influences that have contributed in forming the person that needs our love. The myth of fairness as well as the myth of a

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<sup>157</sup> Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity*, pg.119.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

meritocracy can only be transformed into true justice by love, love of one's neighbor and the building of a relationship with that person that informs the action of justice grounded in love. Through prayer and reflection influenced by love, one will come to know God's love in the truest sense of the Word, and in doing so one will then be able to love one's neighbor as Jesus has loved us. Another aspect in getting to know God is through the teaching of Jesus, specifically when He preaches about the coming Kingdom of God. By understanding how God's kingdom would exist, and how one would enter the Kingdom, we learn about the nature of God. McVerry explains that the Kingdom of God belongs to the poor and that only through compassion, a quality of love, can one enter the Kingdom. McVerry uses the teaching of Jesus found in Luke 14:12-14 which is:<sup>159</sup>

When you hold a lunch or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or your wealthy neighbors, in case they may invite you back and you have repayment. Rather, when you hold a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you.

This passage illustrates how the "last will be first and the first will be last" in the Kingdom of God, essentially showing the reader that only through love and compassion of those who society see as "less" than you will you enter the Kingdom of God. If this passage was literally followed, one could assume that your friends and neighbors would come to resent you, complaining that you never invite them to dinner. Yet if you built relationships with those who society deems unattractive you will begin to form an inclusive society, where all people, regardless of stature or wealth, will be treated as equal, resulting in a society where all people try to build loving relationships with others

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<sup>159</sup> McVerry, *Jesus: Social Revolutionary*, pg.35.

regardless of what they can do for you. I will revisit other qualities that Jesus teaches about the Kingdom of God in relation to love of neighbor, but for a person wanting to know God, the study of the Kingdom of God along with prayer and reflection will bring him or her closer to God. Yet to know God one must also love one's neighbor, which is more an action than an understanding. Yet what qualities must one possess if one truly wants to follow the command from Jesus to love one's neighbor? There are an infinite number of characteristics manifested from the love of one's neighbor that should be explored and in this paper a significant number of them will be examined, which will inform and expand what it means to follow Jesus' command to love one's neighbor. I will first focus on the type of love Jesus spoke of in the Greatest Commandment and try to identify the numerous qualities one must possess if a person wants to follow His command. By identifying these qualities I will be answering not only how Jesus wants us to love our neighbor but also continue to reveal who God is. Only through the praxis of love can one obtain an intimate knowledge of who God is as well as understanding the nature of God. For one must act on the love they receive from God to gain not only a deeper understanding of God but to build a loving relationship with God.

One quality that manifests itself by loving one's neighbor is hope. When Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 about what he perceived Jesus to mean when preaching about love, he believed that the integral part of that hope encompasses love, then one realizes that hope becomes a praxis of love. This passage should be read to gain an understanding of what love is and the qualities that it takes on when a person attempts to

love the way God loves us<sup>160</sup>, his creation. “So faith, hope, love remain, these three, but the greatest of these is love.”<sup>161</sup> A lot of people are throwing the word hope around without regard to how hope is a vital component to love. Without hope the ability to imagine the possible, it is impossible to continue to love one’s neighbor the way that Jesus Christ loved us. If a person cannot imagine what can be possible if every single person followed His command to love God and neighbor, the ability to love is lost along with its transformative power. If a person is oppressed, kept in poverty, abused, to the point that hope is lost, then not only the true nature of humanity is lost but so also humanity’s faith. To continue day after day to love God and neighbor one must be fueled by the hope that their love will transform and change lives sustained by their faith in God and Jesus and that with love all things are possible. Hope allows love to blossom and spread to those most in need of love, and faith in God sustains and nurtures that hope until one day they will be in the position to spread the hope that faith has built and love their neighbor. Hope allows one to visualize the possible options so that through love and prayer those possibilities can become a reality, which makes hope the igniter of change, and change that is grounded in love of neighbor will lead to a world that resembles the Kingdom of God more and more every day.

## Christian Love or *Agape*

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<sup>160</sup> Humans can only attempt to reach the level of love in which God loves us, though only very few human have come close, the love of God should be seen as an ideal, but an ideal that each person should strive towards.

<sup>161</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:13

Jesus showed His disciples how He expected them to love their neighbors, which is regarded as Christian love. What quantifiable qualities make Christian love so powerful and all encompassing? “As Victor Furnish says, for Jesus the love command functioned as ‘the hermeneutical key to the law’s interpretation’ and was ‘an integral part of his proclamation of the coming Reign of God.’ Jesus understood the imminent reign of God as establishing ‘God’s own sovereign power, justice, and mercy,’ and he called people ‘to turn and receive God’s proffered love and forgiveness- a love which actively seeks out the sinner, just as the father sought out the prodigal son. God’s reign is thereby understood as the rule of love.’”<sup>162</sup> In this section I will explore the different types of love that have been attributed to Christian love that inform the command to love God and neighbor so that the qualities of Christian love can be identified. “Love is the norm for life. But what do we mean by love? What is the true shape of love?”<sup>163</sup> To answer these questions one must examine the four major Christian definitions of love presented by Glen H. Stassen in *Kingdom Ethics*, which at times conflict with one other, to identify the type of Christian love that best fits with Jesus’ Greatest/New Commandment. Sacrificial love will be examined first, followed by mutual love, and thirdly love as equal regard, concluding with an examination of delivering love.<sup>164</sup>

To gain a deeper understanding of Christian love as a sacrificial love the writings of Anders Nygren, a Swedish bishop, shall be examined. “Ander Nygren defines *agape*, the major New Testament word for love, as sacrificial love. Such love is purely unselfish, spontaneous and unmotivated by any value or benefit the other might have for us. It is not created by any value it sees in others but instead creates value in them. We

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<sup>162</sup> Victor Paul Furnish, *Love Commands in the New Testament*, pg.68.

<sup>163</sup> Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom ethics: following Jesus in contemporary context*, pg.328.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, pg.327-337.



love regardless of the attractiveness of the one we love, in an uncalculating, unlimited and unconditional way. This is not something we do or are able to do; instead, God initiates it as pure gift, and we merely reflect the love that shines from God through us toward others.”<sup>165</sup> Reducing men and women to be only capable of merely reflecting the love of God on to our neighbors is but one aspect of the love one must have for his or her neighbor. This concept addresses the human inability to obtain a state where we can create our own love comparable to that of the love of God.

Love does not get its meaning merely by its definition but by its function in the narrative that shapes particular traditions. Sacrificial love as defined [by Nygren] fits Nygren’s Lutheran understanding of the atonement (God’s act of reconciliation with humanity through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus). In Nygren’s understanding, the atonement is pure, unmerited gift, and there is nothing that we contribute. We are merely passive recipients of what God does for us, with passive righteousness given by grace, without any calculation of our merit. We cannot love God. God loves us.<sup>166</sup>

The capacity for love in Nygren’s eyes is only that of love of God, making the love of neighbor an impossibility without the grace of God enabling one to harness the love of God and direct it toward our neighbors. Humans’ selfish love is therefore transformed by God’s sacrificial love into a charitable generous love resulting in a magnificently wonderful relationship between neighbors. Some of the problems highlighted by Stassen are that this type of love described by Nygren severs the joining of love and justice which is paramount in not only the coming Kingdom of God but embodied by the actions of

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<sup>165</sup> Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom ethics: following Jesus in contemporary context*, pg.328.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

Jesus Christ. “This dichotomy between love and justice has often led Christians to claim that they were loving persons while they neglected justice. And it has sometimes led thoughtful Christians, such as Reinhold Niebuhr, to believe that their concern for justice stands in stark tension with the (sacrificial) “love ethic of Jesus.”<sup>167</sup> To understand the command to love one’s neighbor, the love must encompass justice and thus sacrificial love, while but one component of love, falls short in encompassing all of the qualities that the love of one’s neighbor must contain.

The examination of mutual love, a love that responds to God’s love is a love that has no single dimension. It does not reduce the meaning of *agape* to one ahistorical meaning as Nygren does when he describes sacrificial love.<sup>168</sup> “The love of God is known as concern, devoted care, willingness to share in the life of a particular people to set them free and to deal with them graciously in their desires and passions, health and sickness, worship and pleasure, warfare and peace, life and death.”<sup>169</sup> Humans’ love of God cannot be merely reflected from His own love, but must emerge from the heart and soul of those who love Him, Christians who seek a relationship with God, not simply a one way relationship where humans receive God’s love, but a relationship where each entity manifests his or her love for the other, is the foundation for loving one’s neighbor. “The love of God becomes the suffering, self-giving love of the merciful God for sinners, actualized when God gives his only Son to share the human lot, to suffer the limitations of human existence and to die that the world might be reconciled to him... God loves his Son and he loves the world with an unshakable will to communion.”<sup>170</sup> The necessary

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<sup>167</sup> Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom ethics: following Jesus in contemporary context*, pg.329.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, pg.329-331.

<sup>169</sup> Williams, pg.22-23

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, pg.35-37

dimensions for love according to Williams are individuality, freedom with limits, acting and receiving, the power to change the other and be changed by the other and an impartial judgment and justice.<sup>171</sup> Individuality means that one's selfhood cannot be destroyed or absorbed by another. Freedom with limits means "we cannot give ourselves authentically to another in love without the will to assume the demands and risks which are present."<sup>172</sup> Acting and receiving and the power to change the other as well as be changed is intertwined, meaning that one must be open to being affected by the relationship with the other and that one must be moved and perhaps transformed by the relationship with the other, investing so much of oneself into that relationship so that change is possible. The reality that we are loved has the power to change a person, transform him or her into a person who is capable of loving one's neighbor as well as God. Justice according to Williams, means that "even the most radical assertions that the divine love is 'uncalculating' usually comes with the concession that love is concern for the need of the neighbor," which requires that one pay special attention to equality and justice.<sup>173</sup> All five of these dimensions point to a community in which mutual love or a relational love builds a covenant that respects otherness informed by justice and has the ability to remove the burdens of the oppressed.<sup>174</sup>

The third definition of Christian love resembles the second in that it states that one should love all persons equally, regardless of who they are or what they can do for you. "Equal regard, as the definition of *agape*, has the advantage that it fits well with the struggle for justice. Justice is based on equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for

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<sup>171</sup> Williams, pg.114-122

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., pg.116

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., pg.121-122

<sup>174</sup> Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom ethics: following Jesus in contemporary context*, pg.331.

all persons. And equal regard seems less susceptible to paternalism; all are equal.”<sup>175</sup> Subsequently, this concept of equal regard is very similar to mutual love in that it builds on the moral principle that Jesus imparted by dying for all people, namely that all persons are equally valuable.<sup>176</sup> As 1 Corinthians 12 states, just as different parts of the body have different functions, all are useful to a person in different ways, just as all members of Christianity may be called to different functions, all are part of the body of Christianity, and each valuable in his or her own way.

The final definition of Christian love is that of delivering love. “Proponents of delivering love argue that love is not just a single principle, like a song sung in monotone, but a complex drama, with different dramatic actions as the characters grow and interact.”<sup>177</sup> The concept of delivering love is that one must look to the many different examples of love throughout the Bible in order to understand and gain a comprehensive understanding of the varied and complex meaning of *agape* that the Bible defines. Like both mutual love and love as equal regard, delivering love encompasses through the stories of the Bible what the shape of love can take. Stassen believes that no other story in the Bible “spells out the shape of love as fully as does the parable of the compassionate Samaritan.”<sup>178</sup> The parable of Jesus’ answer to the lawyer’s question: ‘Who is my neighbor?’ - itself a follow-up to the lawyer’s original question of how he might attain eternal life, and Jesus’ response demanding love of God and neighbor.”<sup>179</sup> The parable of the Good Samaritan shows the reader “the shape of love,” as well as the love that Jesus expects from his followers. Each definition or concept of Christian love plays a part into

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<sup>175</sup> Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom ethics: following Jesus in contemporary context*, pg.332.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, pg.333.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, pg.333.

<sup>178</sup> Found in Luke 10:25-37

<sup>179</sup> Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom ethics: following Jesus in contemporary context*, pg.334.

one's understanding of how Jesus taught his disciples to love God and neighbor, and each one making up a whole that encompasses an understanding of what Christian love requires from believers in Christ.

## Manifestations of Love taught by Jesus Christ

Many of the teaching of Jesus Christ deal with, either directly or indirectly, loving one's neighbor and God, and more specifically the qualities one must possess to love one's neighbor as well as God. The qualities and actions that arise from the love of neighbor and God that Jesus Christ teaches and preaches about are almost endless in scope, and in this thesis I will focus on only a few. The qualities that I have chosen are perhaps the most prominent, but in no way should they be seen as exclusive, but rather as foundational qualities, that can be built upon with the rest of Jesus' teachings to make up the complete qualities that one must possess to fully and faithfully love one's neighbor. The qualities that I have chosen to focus on for this thesis were chosen because they possess the fundamental qualities that make them a foundation that is both necessary and universal; essentially these are how the Greatest Commandment will initially manifest itself in the actions of love of neighbor and God.

The first quality of loving one's neighbor is that of communalism, coupled with charity. This quality stands out because it is essential to loving one's neighbor, but equally important it speaks to the consumer culture that is at times all-encompassing in the United States of America. Secondly I will explore dignity and equality, two more essential qualities that Jesus taught in regards to loving one's neighbor. The idea that all

men and women are created equally is an old concept<sup>180</sup> that has only recently been applied to the treatment of women and men, yet Jesus treated people with equality 2000 years ago, and by living his life in a way that brought about dignity and equality to all people he encountered he set an example for all of his followers, present and future, to follow. Lastly I will examine the qualities of justice and freedom in relation to loving one's neighbor. All of these qualities as well as many others that I have not mentioned together form a person's understanding of exactly how Jesus expected his followers to love their neighbors.

One quality that the early Christians believed to be encompassed by loving one's neighbor is communalism. In the Acts of the Apostles it is written exactly how the Christian community acted according to this belief that was directly influenced by the preaching and teachings of Jesus Christ. It is written:

Peter [said] to them, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is made to you and to your children and to all those far off, whomever the Lord our God will call." He testified with many other arguments, and was exhorting them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand persons were added that day. They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common;

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<sup>180</sup> See Genesis 1:27

they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying the flavor with all people.<sup>181</sup>

The Christian community being described in Acts is very much an ideal, but an ideal that all Christians must continually try to achieve. The idea that the spirit of communalism could be duplicated exactly as described above in the present day is not an impossible feat, but it would take much hard work and a commitment to communalism that would dictate that a group of believers would have to fully commit to this enterprise while sacrificing many of the common luxuries that most people have become accustomed to owning. Just as there were many obstacles to the early Christians achieving the communalism being described in Acts that was modeled on the relationship of Jesus and His disciples, there are perhaps different obstacles for present day Christians, but by no means should the ideal be disregarded by those in the position of authority in Christian churches.

Bass illustrates this point by telling a story about her high school youth group in which one teenager, after hearing this section of Acts read, remarks to the pastor that the Christians described in the story sound more like Communists than Christians. To which the pastor explained that while the early Christians were not Communists, "The birth of the church was a very special time, different from the rest of history. God marked that occasion with strange signs that witness to God's power- like miracles and the sharing of property. After the book of Acts ends, these things cease and Christians form a more

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<sup>181</sup> Acts 2:38-47

normal kind of church.”<sup>182</sup> But, as Bass points out, while this brought relief to the teenagers it was not the truth. It is very clear what Jesus’ stance was on wealth and those who love money, and I shall explore it in more detail next, but even at Jesus’ time and shortly after, when people had very little, and the age of consumerism was not yet upon us, “[Christians] struggled with their relationship to property and money- and in greater part concluded that wealth was at the very least, somewhat unseemly.”<sup>183</sup> And while this may be true, it does not change how Jesus viewed money as well as sharing with those in need. No one can argue with the fact that people love their possessions, that what they buy or acquire holds great value for them, and are perhaps the hardest things to give up. It is perhaps the greatest obstacle standing in the way of them fully loving not just their neighbors but also God. Jesus knew this and could see that this would only increase to the point when it was all consuming, and therefore spoke out against the danger of wealth and property and in accordance with Jesus Christ’s Greatest Commandment which calls all Christians to love one’s neighbor which would entail sharing with his or her neighbor. Yet, I wonder how this ideal was changed into a “special period” that negated not only Jesus’ Greatest Commandment but also all of his other teachings and preaching about the evils of property and possessions. The *Didache* “warned against the evils of loving money and failing to be generous, even condemning ‘advocates of the rich’ to hell. Radical charity, such as selling all one’s goods for the poor, was intertwined with hospitality as part of the new Christian community’s basic framework of morality and a mark of discipleship.”<sup>184</sup> Even in today’s world there is little written, and even less preached, about living simply by using only what one needs to survive and giving the rest

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<sup>182</sup> Bass, *A People’s History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story*, pg.65.

<sup>183</sup> Bass, *A People’s History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story*, pg.66.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.



to the poor and needy. The idea of communalism in all aspects of a person's life, from the house they live in to the food they eat, is so foreign to most Americans that most churches simply accept this as some unchangeable fact of life, but as Basil the Great wrote in the fourth century, "While we try to amass wealth, make piles of money, get hold of land as our real property, overtop one another in riches, we have palpably cast off justice, and lost the common good. I should like to know how any man can be just, who is deliberately aiming to get out of someone else what he wants for himself."<sup>185</sup> Basil the Great illuminates the reason why money and property and possessions are a hindrance to Christians, because they take away from not only the love one has for God but also the love one has for his or her neighbor.<sup>186</sup> Even the most righteous man or woman can be swayed from living out the Word of Jesus if he or she is surrounded day in and day out by all of the wondrous things one can purchase on earth, and hence why if one wants to not only follow the teachings and actions of Jesus Christ it would be only reasonable to rid oneself of all extraneous and unneeded possessions and property.<sup>187</sup> The command that Jesus imparted to his followers, to love God and neighbor, can only be realized if a person can truly say that the possessions that he or she owns are a necessity to sustaining their life and not something to behold or gain satisfaction from, for possessions such as these will inhibit one from building a loving relationship with God as well as one's neighbor. There is no universal answer to what is excessive, perhaps in some places two

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<sup>185</sup> Bass, *A People's History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story*, pg.66.

<sup>186</sup> If one wanted to acquire wealth to help others, meaning that that person would capitalize on others' labor and talents, would be akin to going to war to bring peace, both create their own destruction and poverty in the name of achieving some good, but really only brings more suffering and misery to those who are trying to be helped.

<sup>187</sup> The idea of extraneous and unneeded possessions and property is highly subjective in nature, and each person must ask themselves if they truly need this possession or that object, while also asking themselves if their time and money could be used more to help others than helping themselves, all with the love of God in their heart.

camels would be excessive because most have none, while here in America it would be hard to justify owning ten cars all used for your personal pleasure, but since it is so subjective, one must always examine their life and rid one's self of anything that takes away from loving God and his or her neighbor. Implicit in the Greatest Commandment, and evidenced by the life of Jesus, is to not let wealth distract or sway someone from loving God and neighbor and should be aspired to by all Christians, and not simply overlooked or deemphasized by those church leaders who they themselves fail to live by His teachings. "It was easy for the church to extol poverty and shun property as long as Christianity remained a persecuted sect. Although the church attracted wealthy people even at that time, almsgiving and hospitality was an expected path to holiness for the whole community insisting that the rich give generously."<sup>188</sup> In Luke 6:24-25 Jesus condemns the rich because He understands the corrupting power of excessive wealth and love of money, a problem that afflicts more people at the present than any other time in history. It is written that Jesus said to his disciples, "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received you consolation. But woe to you who are filled now, for you will be hungry."<sup>189</sup> Here Jesus "utters woes to the rich and powerful because the material things that give them consolation will not last,"<sup>190</sup> and subsequently only a relational love fostered between neighbors as well as God will be the only lasting, not to mention truly satisfying, earthy element that one can obtain on earth. Bass notes that due to the reality of Christianity becoming the official religion of the Roman Empire in 313AD it subsequently benefited from the richness of the empire that made pastors and church

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<sup>188</sup> Bass, *A People's History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story*, pg.66.

<sup>189</sup> Luke 6:24-25.

<sup>190</sup> Thomas L.Schubeck, *Love that does Justice*, pg.43.

leaders extremely wealthy.<sup>191</sup> And according to Bass the practice of applying allegorical reading to problematic texts such as “go sell all you have and give the money to the poor” should not be understood literally but more as metaphor for “giving up anything you love more than God.”<sup>192</sup> The Church as well as the teachings of Jesus Christ had begun to be corrupted by money and power, two things that Jesus rejected as earthly and useless, which to this day have systemically deemphasized Jesus’ Greatest/New Commandment in favor of doctrine and dogma, which has been influenced by the traditions of man and not the life of Jesus. The need for present day Christians to once again bring the ideal and actions of communalism into their daily lives will only enhance their understanding of the Greatest Commandment, which makes excessive wealth and money the biggest obstacle standing in the way of most Christians achieving a personal love of one’s neighbor as well as God. I am not proposing setting up communes but harnessing the spirit of communalism,<sup>193</sup> where all Christians are dedicated to living a simple life, and giving and receiving each to his or her own need. I am, however, rejecting the consumer culture that prevents most people from loving one’s neighbor and therefore disregards Jesus Christ’s Greatest/New Commandment. The Christian Community needs to establish the ideal that loving each person according to his or her own needs as the foundation of loving all humankind. In conjunction with the communal spirit it is not the hatred of money and wealth but the rejection of what it does to people as well as what it stands for, namely oppression and greed. By rejecting these negative qualities for positive ones that Jesus taught, the love of one’s neighbor can be harnessed and spread

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<sup>191</sup> Bass, *A People’s History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story*, pg.67.

<sup>192</sup> Bass, *A People’s History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story*, pg.67.

<sup>193</sup> The spirit of communalism is to share with one’s neighbor, which will intern foster a relational love with one’s neighbor.

throughout the world one person at a time, but the basis for this has to start with the Christian community's love of neighbor grounded in their love for God.

Another quality that is imperative if one wants to fully love one's neighbor is that of dignity or equality. By treating a person with dignity and as one's equal it naturally empowers that person to fully love God and neighbor which will in turn allow all people to love each other. Peter McVerry explains that "one way of summing up the whole revelation of Jesus is to say that, as God is the parent of us all, every human being has the same dignity of being a child of God, no matter who we are or what we may have done."<sup>194</sup> The basic understanding that all humans are also the children of God is as obvious as it is simple, and yet so many people of faith, all faiths, fail to acknowledge or simply ignore the implications of accepting this statement would mean not only for them but for the entire world. For how can a person, let alone a Christian, not love a child of God? How can a person oppress and exploit a person and capitalize on his or her hard work and still love that person? Most would answer that it is impossible to love one's neighbor and still act in this way, but this is how most Americans act toward their neighbor and yet fail to see the evil in taking away a person's dignity by failing to love them as a child of God. When Jesus found someone whose dignity as a human being, a child of God, was being undermined or denied by the attitudes of society and the way in which they were treated, then he had to respond, if he was to be true to the revelation of God that he came to bring."<sup>195</sup>

According to McVerry Jesus responded in three different ways to a person who was being discriminated against by the society at large. First Jesus affirmed their dignity

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<sup>194</sup> McVerry, *Jesus: Social Revolutionary*, pg.19.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

by the way in which he himself treated them. “By reaching out to them in a respectful and dignified way, he communicated to them a sense of their own dignity in the face of the contrary message that they were continually receiving from society.”<sup>196</sup> The people discriminated against since the age of Jesus Christ in the name of Christianity are many and varied, from people enslaved to women who are oppressed to the numerous third world countries who are continually exploited and kept in poverty, all of these people need somebody to reach out to them in a respectful and dignified way, basically treating them as equals. For much of Christian history the ideas of dignity and equality were not considered Christian virtues. “A few verses in the New Testament – like Galatians 3:28, ‘There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus’ - lay fallow in scripture for many centuries before anyone cared to water the seeds of equality planted in that verse.”<sup>197</sup> If we are all equal and deserve the dignity that all people as children of God deserve then why do some Christians and church officials still proceed to oppress and subjugate them on the basis of tradition? Bass notes, “Protestant women started to point out the inconsistency of male pastors proclaiming spiritual liberty from Roman Catholicism yet still condemning women to silence in church.”<sup>198</sup> Only during the enlightenment did Christians interpret scriptures in new ways that finally allowed for the true message of social equality and human rights to reemerge from the teaching of Jesus Christ. McVerry writes that the second way that Jesus addressed the inequality that existed during His time is to challenge the attitudes of the society that kept these people oppressed as well as

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<sup>196</sup> McVerry, *Jesus: Social Revolutionary*, pg.20.

<sup>197</sup> Bass, *A People's History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story*, pg.252.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, pg.253.

challenging the structures that kept the oppressed in their marginalized place.<sup>199</sup> This is evidenced in Jesus talking to the women at the well in John 4:4-42, and breaking down the social constructs that were in place at the time. The separation between the Samaritans and the Jews, who by social custom used different wells and other such facilities, was broken down by Jesus when He simply asked the woman for a drink of water, while also showing the love of God and His neighbor. By challenging the cultural norms that allow for the continued oppression of women, minorities, gays or any person on earth by treating them as a child of God allows for these norms to be changed and fights for equality for all people. Jesus allowed for all people who were oppressed to be freed from that oppression by treating them as individuals with dignity, which may be less effective for overall change but is a needed first step in allowing the individual to begin to hope for something better. A great example of this is when Jesus challenges the attitude of Simon the Pharisee, who is embarrassed and offended by the presence of a sinful woman who came into the Pharisee's house to wash the feet of Jesus and dry them with her hair.<sup>200</sup> Love and forgiveness, allow for this woman to show immense love toward Jesus, which will now allow her the ability to hope for a better future and having faith in God that that future is a possibility. If a person wants to love his or her neighbor he or she must forgive them of all past sins and reestablish a relationship that is neither oppressive nor one of inequality. In the excerpt from Luke Jesus' forgiveness allows for this woman's dignity to be reclaimed. Through His love, this woman is equal to all other children of God. Only by allowing for all people to be treated with equality and dignity can one begin to love one's neighbor as Jesus had loved us. The final way in which Jesus

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<sup>199</sup> McVerry, *Jesus: Social Revolutionary*, pg.20.

<sup>200</sup> See Luke 7:36-50 for the full text. The cultural norm at the time would prohibit a sinful woman to touch a righteous man.

brought about a sense of dignity and equality to all people he met was simply by associating with them, and which led to Him being marginalized as well.<sup>201</sup> “That Jesus did mix socially with sinners is an assured historical fact. It can be found in four independent gospel traditions and in all the literary forms of the Gospels. Such a scandalous practice could not possibly have been invented by his subsequent more ‘respectable’ followers. We might even wonder whether the Gospels have not perhaps played down this aspect of his praxis. Nevertheless the evidence we do have shows clearly enough that Jesus had what is called ‘table-fellowship’ with sinners.”<sup>202</sup> What Nolan calls “table-fellowship” is one in the same as when McVerry refers to “associating with sinners” which in effect allowed people to see that perhaps the societal stigmas that were placed on certain people were unjust and unfounded. Yet even today the very churches that profess their faith in Jesus Christ stigmatize certain people.<sup>203</sup> Subsequently it is just as important as ever to faithfully follow the Greatest Commandment imparted to us by Jesus Christ, and continue to fight against oppression in any shape or form. The message and importance of equality to Americans may seem unneeded because this country has reached a level of equality that is not found in many other countries on earth, but I would argue that Americans must look beyond the borders of this country, as well as at the places in this country where inequality still exists. The idea that all people of earth are children of God should encourage people to fight for equality not just for their neighbors in this country but for their brothers and sisters in every country where structures of oppression still exist. It is our duty, not only as

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<sup>201</sup> McVerry, *Jesus: Social Revolutionary*, pg.22

<sup>202</sup> Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity*, pg.45-46.

<sup>203</sup> Gay and lesbians are just two that come to mind, who are systematically viewed by the Catholic and evangelical churches to be sinners.

Christians but also as people fortunate enough to live in such a prosperous country<sup>204</sup> to fight against the injustices and oppression that continues to rob people of their dignity.

We as Christians must stand up and love all of God's children.

The idea that justice and freedom are essential qualities of loving one's neighbor is paramount to the modern day Christian because we are at a time in history where justice and freedom has been achieved for the greatest number of people.<sup>205</sup> Dr. Cornel West states on his CD *Never Forget: A Journey of Revelations*, "Never forget: Justice is what love looks like in public." "New Testament scholar Marcus Borg says, 'Almost anywhere in the Bible where the word righteousness appears, you can replace it with the word justice. Modern people tend to interpret righteousness as a private and devotional word- a little smug perhaps- but justice is a robust political term.'<sup>206</sup> Bass notes that Borg was raised Lutheran and that Martin Luther himself loved the interplay between the words righteousness and justice. Luther wrote, "But alas in our day [Christian] life is unknown throughout the world, it is neither preached about nor sought after; we are altogether ignorant of our own name and do not know why we are Christians or bear the name of Christians."<sup>207</sup> What Luther wrote can ring true for modern day Christians as well. Many Christians in American are unaware or more truthfully uncaring when the fact that most of the goods purchased in America come from third world countries, most notably China, where they are not only not paid a fair wage but are also oppressed by a totalitarian government that disregards all human rights. The many comforts that inhabit

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<sup>204</sup> It should be noted that much of the United States' prosperity is due to oppressing other countries, both economically and militarily, which should give citizens of this country even more reason to fight against these injustices.

<sup>205</sup> For centuries people believed that most governmental or ruling structures were set up by God, the modern democracy is a relatively new and fragile invention.

<sup>206</sup> Bass, *A People's History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story*, pg.184.

<sup>207</sup> Martin Luther, *Freedom of a Christian in the Protestant Reformation*, pg.23.



most Americans daily life successfully assuage all thoughts about how one's consumer habits affect the rest of the world. All Christians must, through love, challenge these systems that steal the justice from those who so badly need it. But the idea of justice for all has always been a radical idea that can be found just below the surface and which will every so often boil over and be embraced by the masses. "In 1501, sixteen years before Luther published his Ninety-five Theses, a serf named Joss Fritz entered a church and placed a banner over the image of Christ crucified. The banner featured a *Bundschuh*, the laced boot of a peasant, and bore the slogan 'Nothing but Divine Justice'. According to his contemporaries, nearly twenty thousand people followed him in an uprising to rid the bishopric of all taxes and tithes and to make common property of all water, woods, and meadows. For the next few decades rural and urban protests increased, leading historian Heiko Oberman to suggest that Luther's call for justice dovetailed with a 'gospel of social unrest' already present in Germany, where peasants had connected 'justice before God' with justice before human beings.'"<sup>208</sup> For only so long can Jesus' message of love and justice be suppressed by those who seek power and money. Now is the time to rediscover the true meaning of loving one's neighbor, namely that all Christians must stand up for the justice of all people of earth while also personally loving all people one comes into contact with. When Jesus commands to love one's neighbor he is also commanding us to seek justice for those neighbors, not a violent or cruel justice but one based on the foundation of love. The ultimate justice one can hope to accomplish is freedom. Freedom from injustices, from oppressions, from systems of governments that rob people of their basic human rights, rights granted from God, which guarantees not

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<sup>208</sup> Bass, *A People's History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story*, pg.186.

only personal freedom, but also a structure that will insure that all people will be ensured their freedom. “In her speech to the Democratic National Convention in August 2008, Senator Hillary Clinton invoked Harriet Tubman as an example of political fortitude to a wildly cheering crowd: ‘If you hear the dogs, keep going. If you see the torches in the woods, keep going. If there’s shouting after you, keep going. Don’t ever stop. Keep going. If you want a taste of freedom, keep going.’”<sup>209</sup> Bass notes that Tubman probably never said those exact words, but she personified that ideal with her resistance to slavery and involvement in the Underground Railroad.<sup>210</sup> Tubman knew that the first step to justice for all was freedom, and to taste that justice one must do everything and anything to free oneself from the bonds of slavery and injustice, but this could not be accomplished alone, one needed people who loved all people regardless of social standing, a love that Jesus commanded in His Greatest Commandment. Freedom in the most basic human right, but even today the basic and essential right of freedom is denied to many. We as Christians must not stop loving our neighbors while fighting for their freedom, this will place them on the road to justice and enable them to hope for even more justice and intern will enable them to love their neighbor just as we have loved them and Jesus continues to love us.

## Putting the Principle of Loving one’s Neighbor into Practice

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<sup>209</sup> Bass, *A People’s History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story*, pg.257.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

What does loving one's neighbor look like in real life? The examination of two different examples will show two ways in which the love for one's neighbor is shown. It should be understood that these are extraordinary acts, but loving one's neighbor need not be something so extraordinary. All one has to do to love one's neighbor, according to the Greatest Commandment, is to think of the needs of our neighbors along with our own, and always with love in our heart. The notion that one must radically reorient one's life toward loving ones neighbor is true down to its very essence, and while this transformation may not be completed overnight, the daily love that one encounters by loving one's neighbor will eventually take hold and radically change them.

The first example of loving one's neighbor is that of Kevin and Joan Salwen and their daughter Hannah. With the encouragement of their daughter the Salwens sold their million dollar house and donated half of the sale to charity. It all began when Kevin and Hannah pulled up to a stoplight and noticed a homeless man to their left and a guy in a Mercedes to their right. Hannah said, "Dad, if that man didn't have such a nice car, then that homeless man could have a meal."<sup>211</sup> To which the father responded, "Yes, but if we didn't have such a nice car that man could have a meal."<sup>212</sup> After some discussion at the dinner table that night about the various charities that both parents supported, Hannah their daughter purposed that they sell their house and give half the money to charity. That is what they did. When speaking to a group of teenagers at the Marymount Catholic girls' school on Fifth Avenue the father told the group that "we know that's a ridiculous thing to do. But everyone has something they can afford to give away."<sup>213</sup> I would contend that if one follows the Greatest Commandment, it would not be ridiculous, but

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<sup>211</sup> Larissa MacFarquhar, "Dept. of Philanthropy: New Math," *The New Yorker*, pg.21.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

paramount to following the commandment. But one should not fall into the trap of simply giving money away and think that somehow they are loving their neighbor completely. One should always keep in mind, that like philanthropy, loving one's neighbor isn't just about giving money, it's also about giving yourself. As mentioned previously, one must build a relationship with his or her neighbors to love them, and simply giving money fails to establish that relationship.

The second example is that of Father Gregory Boyle, who has worked with former gang members for over 25 years. Father Boyle likes to say, "We are all God's children, but sometimes we need to be reminded of that fact." Carrying this thinking forward, how would one treat a child of God? If he or she was selling drugs, robbing people and the like, should you still love them? Father Boyle's answer is always yes! Yes you should love them, yes you should build relationships with them, and yes you should help them. Father Gregory Boyle's book *Tattoos on the Heart* has so many stories of how he loves his neighbors that it would be impossible to single one out. But the subtitle to his book, *The Power of Boundless Compassion*, says just how faithfully he follows this commandment with his every breath. Father Boyle often talks about a "no-matter-what-ness" as a way we should love our neighbors. That no matter what a person has done in the past, love can change them. For many of the young people that Father Boyle helps, they have never had a person who simply loves them for who they are, much in the same way that Jesus loved all people.

The Greatest/New Commandment reorients peoples' lives to love one another, and building relationships with those around us. All Christians are called to follow Jesus' example to love one another, and by loving one another we can change the world into the

Kingdom of God. The search for an ethical command is replaced with a command to build relationships with one's fellow neighbors. The love that the Gospels portray is a relational love between neighbors who can embrace the love that Jesus' showed all men and women. These neighbors, who must not only love each other but also build a mutual relationship, will transform the world from what it is into what Jesus Christ imagined. To follow the Greatest/New Commandment one must realize that all humans are our neighbors, and it is our duty as Christians to love them, radically and with our whole heart.

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