

Love the Lord Your God, Love Your Neighbor

Primary text: Matt. 22:34-40 (parallel in Mark 12:28-30)

By Bob Young

My goal for this sermon is to say something significant about love as the primary dynamic that establishes the identity of God's people. Preparing, thinking through, this sermon has challenging – not because the texts are difficult to analyze, interpret, understand, but because my desire to reexamine, rethink, move beyond customarily thinking and explanations, has required me to break unexplored ground.

Introduction

The love I want to talk about is very specific – *agape* love. The Gospel of Matthew does not explain this kind of love. The gospel with the most references is John (31 times). Matthew has only 7, Mark 5, Luke 10. In the gospel, *agape* love is mentioned 53 times as a verb, only 8 times as a noun.

Step 1 in introducing the study is to understand that in the NT, but especially in the gospels, love is a verb. Love is something you do, not an attitude, not an emotion, not a feeling. The noun form is not common--almost rare. Love is not to be understood in the abstract.

Agape love in the gospel of Matthew is easy to summarize: love your enemies (5), you will love your master (6), and love God and neighbor (22).

Some of this is repeated from a previous study of Matthew 22. Be patient, this is important, I seek to examine the text, the principle, as a jewel, turning it over, exploring every facet, seeking a fresh understanding.

In Matthew, the supreme evidence of love is putting “First Things First” (FTF)

The first thing is love for God.

When we pursue God with reckless abandon, we will win the world for Jesus, we will succeed.

We have a great opportunity. Having opportunities does not make us uncommon — what we do with an opportunity can make us uncommon, set us apart.

Personally. Each Christian is called to surrender — the priority is not the current issues, personal preferences, or desires. Engulf all of life in the relationship with God, let him be supreme.

Ministry. The local church is called to “the” ministry, preparing God's people for works that advance “the ministry.” Churches and church members are distracted by a plurality of ministries. Members are not sure what is of most importance. Most important is what God says is important. To love God means to listen and obey. The mission field begins at the doorstep of the church. My five-plus decades in local ministry are past, but I know from experience that the local church can easily double or triple every ten years! This growth is not the result of loving your neighbor. This growth is the result of loving God first. The evangelism and discipleship of a local church is a measure of love for God. Are we listening, are we obeying?

Mission work. The mission field of the local church can be seen as concentric, ever-expanding circles. The nearest mission field is usually the target of local church ministry. A second circle may encompass what is often called domestic missions – in our own country. A third circle represents international mission work. What is God's vision for mission work? Those who love God will catch the vision because it is from God and because they love God. God is enabling and empowering mission work that is beyond understanding, comprehension, planning. Churches are multiplying – local churches are multiplying souls rather than merely adding. The number of churches is multiplying. The harvest is plenteous. Loving God means seeking the harvest with reckless abandon, investing everything in reaping the harvest He is providing. The fruitfulness of mission work in a local church is a measure of love for God.

What will those who love God do?

Here is the cornerstone teaching of Jesus, Matt. 22:34-40. The questions that are raised are important. Knowledge means having right answers; wisdom means finding right questions. Right questions are a key to getting right answers. Here is a question. Which is the first and greatest command?

Jesus could have said seek and save the lost. Put first things first. But he did not so respond. He could have said help others, but he did not. He could have said love one another, but he did not.

Most important: love God -- fully! Not haphazardly -- fully.

The second command (#2) is similar, love neighbor as yourself. No greater commands. No section of Scripture more important. These two love commandments define discipleship for the authentic, serious follower of Jesus.

Contemporary churches and Christians tend to think #2 is #1, and #1 is #2. Most churches focus first on #2. Most churches want to love people, to communicate and show love. "At least they know that we love them." That is how many churches do ministry; that is how many churches do mission work. This approach puts things in reverse order. How can we restore #1 as #1?

May I say that we will not have a clear Christian identity until we get #1 as #1.

This lesson is about loving God. This lessons about learning to listen, to obey. God will take care of the consequences. Do you know how to focus on #1 first? The Bible says we do not know how to do #2 without #1. The primary objective of life is #1. One must understand #1 in order to do #2. God has put #1 as #1 on purpose. Following God, following Jesus starts from the beginning. It is hard to have effective church ministry if the church is not making #1 the top priority.

In the church, first step, we should hold one another accountable for #1, not #2. Pursue, model, and teach #1. Who is a biblical leader? A leader is someone who does #1 supremely. Loving God leads to loving people and making disciples. We overcomplicate it. It is simple. Love God. The one who loves God will do what God wants and accomplish God's purpose. If you are not seeing God's ultimate purpose fulfilled through your life and ministry, something is wrong, and the first place to look to find out what is wrong is right here -- #1, love God wholeheartedly.

Let me tell you what God is going to ask at the judgment. Did you follow me or did you do your own thing? (This is the title of a sermon in this series.) Without Christ, life will be lived in mediocrity. Christians cannot settle for mediocrity — life is too short. We are not going to live forever. We are not invincible; we must learn to number our days to gain a heart of wisdom. Can you see the door of opportunity? If so, will you watch it go, sit and wait, or will you do something. Pay attention to commandment #1.

Loving God is our God-connection. How do I connect with God? How do we connect with anyone, anything we love? This is a love-question. What can you do, remembering that love is a verb?

I have been able to focus my understanding of Matt. 22 but considering life from two perspectives. Do I see myself on a rescue mission or a treasure hunt?

#2 is a rescue mission, people out to save world. That is not the primary motive in my life. It is a primary purpose in my life, but it is insufficient motivation. When we talk about love, we are talking about our motivation.

We are on a treasure hunt, #1 is first, find the treasure in the field, buy the field. Jesus came to this earth on a rescue mission. We are on treasure hunt, so that when we find the treasure, we can participate in his rescue mission (not ours). You will constantly struggle with the rescue mission until you find the treasure. You have nothing to share! You have no treasure that causes rejoicing.

I hope to be helpful. Contrast these two: rescue mission vs. treasure hunt.

What is the love that defines us? Not John 13, love one another, not loving neighbors. Make sure you get to #1 and put it first: passionately pursue God; make it your primary aim to connect with God. My daily desire is activity with God one on one.

We can do spiritual activities corporately, but we are missing something if we never get one on one with God. Doing things for God is not the same as loving God. Doing ministry not the same as loving God, loving people not the same as loving God. Spend time with God. If you love him, obey him. John 15 is an incredible text in its context. here is a last-minute cram session: Jesus summarizes it simply -- bear fruit, fruit that lasts.

When we learn how to pursue God, that will last. When we teach people to pursue people, that will not last. Connect with God. How is your God-connection? Put #1 as #1. God is first. Love God with all my heart, maximize my connection with God.

Build spiritual roots. How will you live? God's way or your way? Find God, need God, spend time with God. Do not begin the search before you find the treasure, so find the treasure. Make sure you have the treasure. Do not delay. This is the day. When you find the treasure, you don't have to defend Jesus, you only have to declare what he has done, what he has done for you.