

Exceeding Love: The Sum and Substance of the Law

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In the gospels of Matthew and Mark,¹ Jesus links two commandments together, offering what is often described as a summary of the law. In Matthew, a lawyer, in an effort to “test him,” asks, “which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus responds, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.” You would think he had answered the question, but he goes on to say, “And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” And then pronounces, “On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” In Mark, Jesus is asked a similarly worded question, “Which commandment is the most important of all?”, to which Jesus responds, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’” As in Matthew, he continues, “The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

A similar linking takes place in Luke’s gospel. In Luke’s account, however, the circumstances and nature of the exchange are quite different and most likely represent a separate incident than that which is found in Matthew and Mark.² In Luke, Jesus is asked (also as a “test”), “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” To which Jesus

¹ Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34. Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Given the practice of rabbis being asked to make such determinations (as in the other two synoptic accounts), we can assume that similar questions would often be asked of rabbis. Noting the differences in material and intention between the Matthew/Mark account and that which Luke has recorded, it is most likely that this encounter occurred at another point in Jesus ministry. Indeed, the accounts represent a phenomenon that may have happened quite often.

responds, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” The lawyer then goes on to offer the summation that we see Jesus offer in the other accounts (some minor differences are present), “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus expresses his approval to the man in Luke’s account by instructing him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

This presentation attempts to suggest some notions along the following lines: the true intent of the twofold command to love; the twofold command and the continuing authority of the law; the Old Testament precedents of the twofold command; the call for “radical discipleship”; the ultimate substance of the twofold command; and what I will call “gospel transgression” in the light of the twofold command and the ministry of Jesus.

The Greatest Commandment

Matthew 22:

³⁴ But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. ³⁵ And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

Mark 12:

²⁸ And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” ²⁹ Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ ³¹ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” ³² And the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. ³³ And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” ³⁴ And when Jesus saw that he

answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.

The question that serves as a catalyst to the exchanges above reveals the centrality of the law for the Jews. There is evidence that the encounter reflects an ongoing debate among the rabbis of the day who sought to rank in importance all of the laws. For some, there were laws that were considered “weightier” than others and therefore demanded more attention.³ As such, at least within the context of Matthew’s account where it is described as a test, “The question is one of fundamental importance, for the answer to it will establish whether Jesus belongs to some radical fringe group or within the piety of mainstream Judaism.”⁴

A contrast between the accounts is evident. Matthew communicates a hostile posture toward Jesus on the part of the questioner, who on behalf of his party purposes to launch another salvo after a previous attempt to discredit Jesus failed. In Mark, the questioner, impressed with a previous answer, seems genuinely interested to receive insight from Jesus. While Matthew’s curt ending suggests the Pharisees had no particular objection to his answer, Mark’s extended interchange offers more than a suggestion.

The Greek word attributed to the scribe, *kalos*, expresses a very positive sentiment:⁵ ““You are right [*kalos*], Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him. And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is much more than all

³ This phenomenon is reflected in the “woes” passage from Matthew 23: “²³“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.

²⁴You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!

⁴ Donald A. Hagner. *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary, Word Incorporated (1995). 644-6

⁵ All senses of the term “may be brought together under the idea of ‘what is ordered or sound.’” G. Bertram, *TDNT, Abridged in One Volume*, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. Eerdmans (Grand Rapids: 1985) 402

whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” This last statement is particularly striking. The scribe’s “knowledge of Scripture . . . is considerable” as his answer “reflects a collage of OT texts (Deut 4:35; 6:4; Lev 19:18; 1 Sam 15:22; Isa 45:21; Hos 6:6).” And most importantly, he “agrees with Jesus that ‘burnt offerings and sacrifices’ must yield to a right relationship with God and a moral relationship with others.” James Edwards notes that, “the offerings referred to were the kind that were consumed by fire rather than eaten by worshippers, which meant they were dedicated solely and wholly to God.” This implies that the scribe agrees that, “[e]ven the most sacred duties . . . may not take precedent over *agape* love – and they have no meaning unless they are expressions of it.” As such, it “reminds us that Jesus and his Jewish interlocutor . . . found themselves in substantial agreement on the sum and purpose of the law.”⁶

Before going much further it will be good to acknowledge what Jesus did *not* mean to imply by speaking as he did. Jesus’ summarizing answer should not be construed as inferring in any way that Jesus felt that concern for the law was invalid or misplaced, as though love trumped law. The law was important and what it represented was of utmost significance. While he upbraids the Pharisees for the traditions that had been built up around observance of the law,⁷ the validity and authority of the law is not called into question. Perhaps the strongest statement in this regard is found at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5: “¹⁷Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law

⁶ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Eerdmans (Grand Rapids: 2002) 373-4. Edwards also suggests that this exchange should temper any notions that Jesus and the religious leaders “were without exception locked in intractable opposition at every point, and that Jesus categorically rejected everything Jewish.”

⁷ Mark 7: ⁹And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! ¹⁰For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ ¹¹But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban’ (that is, given to God)— ¹²then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, ¹³thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.”

or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” What Jesus’ response did imply is that mere external obedience to the law does not constitute fulfilling the law. There is an internal attitude that is meant to serve as an interpretive framework for understanding the law. Hence, Matthew’s account finishes with Jesus declaration that on the twofold commands of love “depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

Why were these two commands brought together into one and considered preeminent? The first part of the twofold command is found in Deuteronomy 6 and is universally considered to reflect the first portion of the Ten Commandments:

¹“Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the rules that the Lord your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, ²that you may fear the Lord your God, you and your son and your son’s son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. ³Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.

⁴“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

¹⁰“And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob . . . ¹²then take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ¹³It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. ¹⁴You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you, ¹⁵for the Lord your God in your midst is a jealous God, lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.

¹⁶“You shall not put the Lord your God to the test . . . ¹⁷You shall

diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and his testimonies and his statutes, which he has commanded you. ¹⁸And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may go well with you, and that you may go in and take possession of the good land that the Lord swore to give to your fathers . . .

²⁰“When your son asks you in time to come, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the Lord our God has commanded you?’ ²¹then you shall say to your son, ‘We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt. And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. ²²And the Lord showed signs and wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes. ²³And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers. ²⁴And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day. ²⁵And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us.’

Broadly speaking, the book of Deuteronomy is a reiteration, prior to Israel’s entering the Promised Land, of the terms of the covenant that Yahweh had made with them: “The Book of Deuteronomy calls for an enactment (renewal) of the covenant as a preparation for the entrance into Canaan – its conquest and occupation – and presents the way of life that the Israelites were to follow in the Promised Land.”⁸ Beginning in chapter 4, the emphasis is upon knowing and doing the commandments that had been given them. Such knowledge and obedience would be key to their success: “And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you” (4:1). Chapter 5 includes a restatement of the Ten Commandments followed by the a similar exhortation: “You shall walk in all the way that the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you shall possess” (5:33).

⁸ Earl S. Kalland, “Deuteronomy.” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 3*, Frank E. Gaeblein, ed. Zondervan (Grand Rapids: 1992) 5.

As is evident in its language, Chapter 6 continues in this vein. Israel must know and do the “commandment, the statutes and the rules” that Yahweh had commanded Moses to teach them. They were to “teach them diligently” to their children so that subsequent generations would know how the Lord had delivered them with a “mighty hand” from the slavery of Egypt to bring them into the “land that he swore to give to our fathers.” The commandments were “for our good always, that he might preserve us alive.” Obedience would manifest their “fear” of Yahweh⁹ and would show them to not be like the previous generation that had gone after other gods. Moses warned that Yahweh was a “jealous God,” so they must heed the commandments “lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.”

Throughout the passage the call is to *know* and *heed* Yahweh’s commands at the peril of destruction. Given that emphasis, the language of *loving* God in verse 5 seems out of place. Must one conclude that knowing and heeding the commandments is equal to loving God? Knowing and heeding seems a long way from love. A child can know the parent’s rules and heed them to the letter so that he or she does not incur a promised punishment, but that does not necessarily mean the child loves the parent.

It is important to note that these words reassert the covenant that God had made with Israel. As such, they represent a form of suzerain-vassal treaties not uncommon in the Near East. In such treaties the suzerain expected obedience from the vassal and it was often expressed in terms of love towards the suzerain. Consequently, it ties “love tightly together with the sense of obedience and loyalty.” But this does not adequately explain the connection between Deuteronomy’s call to obedience and love for, “the teaching on

⁹ “The derived sensation of standing in awe of God and then holding him in utmost reverence and respect.” Kalland, 63.

God's love and the love of the people toward God and toward one another permeates the [Old Testament] in such a manner that it cannot be limited by the use of words for love in the Near Eastern treaties."¹⁰

Perhaps the key to helping us move beyond the notion of love being mere obedience, or obedience motivated by fear of punishment, is found in the phrases, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one," (v. 4) and "these words that I command you today shall be on your heart" (v. 6).

In the famous *Shema*, Moses declares a foundational truth about Yahweh, Israel's God: He is "one." Within its context, this declaration serves as a preemptive warning in the light of the record of the pervasive fickleness of Israel's affections, noted in the brief rehearsing of history included in the opening chapters, as well language in the chapter itself. Verses 10-15 serve to remind the listener of the tragic history of Israel's rebellion and idolatry that so readily marked the years they had spent in the wilderness: ". . . when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob . . . then take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you."

Yahweh, their God, was not a deity like unto the deities all around them. There was not a Yahweh of the fields, a Yahweh of the rivers, a Yahweh of the mountains, a Yahweh of fertility, and a Yahweh of death. Yahweh is one; and he was the one who demonstrated his power and over all polytheistic belief systems when he brought them out of Egypt. That piece of their heritage they were not to forget, for it was an expression

¹⁰ Kalland, 65.

of his love and grace. In chapter 7 we read, “The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (v. 6-8).

The God who was “one” deserved singular obedience. The ubiquitous reminders of God’s deliverance from Egypt throughout the record of his dealings with Israel appear designed to provoke gratitude and, therefore, allegiance in the hearts of Israel. As such, the call to heed is a call to the heart. That is, for the Israelite, loving Yahweh with all of one’s being would be expressed in devoted obedience to the God who had redeemed them from bondage and brought them into the Promised Land.

The second phrase that will prove helpful in hearing the call to heed as a call to love is Moses’ instructions in verse 6: “And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart.” The Hebrew term translated “heart,” *lebab*, represents “the person’s integrating center . . . the term embraces one’s rational, emotional, and volitional faculties.”¹¹ Should an Israelite have the Lord’s expressed will governing his “integrating center” the hope for remaining faithful to God would be strengthened. The gravitational pull of the Lord’s will at the center of his being would keep him from drifting off after other gods.

¹¹ Knox Chamblin. *Matthew, Volume 2*. Christian Focus Publications (Ross-shire, Great Britain: 2010) 1101

On the eve of Israel's going in to possess the land that had been promised to their forefathers, what were they being called to do? Earl Kalland suggest, "They were to love him totally . . . The exhortation to love 'with all you heart and with all your soul and with all your strength' is not a study on faculty psychology. It is rather a gathering of terms to indicate the totality of a person's commitment of self in the purest and noblest intentions of trust and obedience toward God."¹² It is not hard to understand why Jesus would have considered this the greatest commandment.

The second part of the twofold command is found in Leviticus 19 and in universally understood to reflect to the second table of the law:

⁹"When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. ¹⁰And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God.

¹¹"You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. ¹²You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.

¹³"You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired servant shall not remain with you all night until the morning. ¹⁴You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the Lord.

¹⁵"You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. ¹⁶You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am the Lord.

¹⁷"You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. ¹⁸You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

The call to love one's neighbor as oneself comes at the end of a catalog of actions and attitudes that reminds one of the New Testament's Golden Rule.¹³ Generosity and kindness toward those who are in need or without power; truthfulness in one's dealings;

¹² Kalland, 64.

¹³ ". . . whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them" (Matthew 7:12).

fair treatment of those who work for you; not acting cruelly toward those who are disadvantaged; the seeking and doing of justice; and having no animosity held within one's heart, are all enjoined and would indeed be welcomed were we to be at the receiving end.

In particular, the phrase in question comes at the very end of the admonition to not “take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people.” It is interesting to note the qualification “against the sons of your own people,” to the phrase, “you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Does this suggest that the concern is only for how the covenant people treat one another, having no bearing upon their dealings with those outside of the covenant? It could appear to be so until one reads further down the code: “When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God” (Leviticus 19:33-34).

Perhaps this is what lay behind the parable that Jesus offers when the scribe in Luke 10, continuing to challenge him and “wanting to justify” himself, asked, “who is my neighbor?” The familiar parable, which has as its protagonist a representative of a despised people, portrays actions and attitudes that demonstrate the love that is to be offered to all. Jesus’ directive to the one who would justify himself echoes the call from Leviticus: “Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” He said, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘You go, and do likewise’” (Luke 10:36-37). It’s as if Jesus is reproofing the man for not reading through to the end of the chapter in Leviticus. In an effort to justify himself,

he limited his obligations to those who would have been easy (or at least easier) for him to love. But this would not accomplish the goal that God had for his people when he laid down the code from which Jesus quotes.

At the beginning of the code stands a declaration that has resonance with the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6: “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” (Leviticus 19:2). God is not like other gods. He is holy. As such, those who are his people are to be holy as well. John Currid explains: “God’s essential nature is one of holiness, and the term for ‘holy’ (Hebrew *qadosh*) means ‘to be set apart, unique, and distinct’. Human holiness is emulation of God, becoming and acting like him.”¹⁴ The call, then, to love our neighbor is to love as God loves. This notion is echoed in the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus teaches:

I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 7:44-48).

If we were to substitute “holy” for “perfect” in the final clauses of the teaching, we would more readily make the connection between God’s holiness and his call for us to love our neighbor as ourselves.

These two passages form the backdrop to Jesus’ summation of the law and, in his words, are the two commandments upon which all the law and the Prophets “depend.”

¹⁴ John D. Currid, *Leviticus*. Evangelical Press (Darlington, England: 2004) 248-9

As stated above, Jesus' response directs the inquirer away from mere external obedience to an internal attitude that is meant to serve as an interpretive framework for understanding the law. Additionally, the twofold command to love does not suggest that we are released from the obligations of the law. "For Jesus, it is not a question of the 'priority of love over law' but of the priority of love *within* the law. Love is the greatest commandment, but it is not the *only* one; and the validity and applicability of other commandments can not be decided by appeal to its paramount demand."¹⁵

This is important to note for one might infer from Jesus' answer that love is the sum total of all that he asks of his followers. As Thomas Schreiner asks, "is the summary of the law in terms of love for God and neighbor a sufficient description of what the law demands?" He observes that the "Synoptic writers do not think so, for there are numerous other commands . . . which flesh out the nature of love." The twofold command for love, therefore, does not lessen the need for obedience to God's law. Quite the contrary:

The commandments are to be fulfilled out of a response of love to God and neighbor; this is the motivation which informs particular obedience. Mechanical or external obedience to the law is not what the Synoptics have in mind when they speak of fulfilling the law. Loving God is the first and great commandment because it is the fulfillment of the first commandment to worship no other god. The fulfillment of the law finally cannot be calculated in terms of the keeping of external requirements, for one can keep external requirements to a significant extent and not love God . . . The call to love God with all one's strength uncovers the depth of God's demand on one's life. (Schreiner, "The Fulfillment of the Law," 14)¹⁶

Jesus encounter with the rich young ruler is illustrative.¹⁷ As Schreiner observes, "Jesus does not ask the ruler if he has loved God with all his heart, but

¹⁵ Douglas J. Moo, "Jesus and the Authority of the Mosaic Law," *JSNT* 20 (1984) 11 *emphasis* in original.

¹⁶ John's gospel is consistent with the Synoptics in this matter. E. g., Jesus teaches, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

¹⁷ Matthew 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30.

whether he has kept some of the commandments from the decalogue, all from the second table.” When the young man affirms, “All these I have kept from my youth,” Jesus responds with the famous instruction, “One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” Jesus’ demand that he sell all and follow him was designed to expose the fact that the man had not really kept all of the law perfectly as he claimed. “He had violated the first commandment because he has another god whom he worshipped more than the one true God.”¹⁸ As Charles Cranfield noted, “the one thing lacking is the all-important thing, a single-hearted devotion to God, obedience to the first of the Ten Commandments.”¹⁹

Though Jesus does expose the primary lack of the man, namely whole-hearted devotion to God, he does not dismiss the need to fulfill the commands of the second table of the law. Jesus does not disapprove of the man’s actions; he disapproves of the man’s heart. He is seeking to provoke something deeper than mere external adherence to a moral code. As stated previously, “it is not a question of the ‘priority of love over law’ but of the priority of love *within* the law.” It is obvious that one cannot, in the name of fulfilling the command to love, dishonor one’s father and mother, commit adultery, murder, steal, or bear false witness against one’s neighbor. Clearly, love involves observance of commands. But as the rich young ruler illustrates, observance of commands does not necessarily involve love. And love is what is called for in the great

¹⁸ Schreiner, 15

¹⁹ As quoted by Schreiner, 16. It is also suggested that he violated the tenth commandment for his desire for his money was greater than his desire for God.

commandment.

But there is more behind Jesus answer to the question of which is the greatest commandment. Ultimately, he seeks to lead his listeners to the understanding that for one to faithfully live out the law's demands is to follow the one who fulfills the law's demands.

Schreiner sees this in Jesus' challenge to the rich young ruler to, "Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; *and come, follow me.*" I emphasize the last clause for as Schreiner points out, "Jesus' response that he should go and sell all that he has should not be interpreted as an extra command above and beyond the intention of the law. Nor should this command be taken as a two-tier ethic with the implication that true disciples give up their possessions." Jesus asked this man to follow him in "radical discipleship" to discover if this man "really loves God with his whole heart and his neighbor as himself." Schreiner concludes:

If one is not willing to follow Jesus in radical discipleship, then one does not love God with all one's heart, mind, soul, and strength. The willingness to follow Jesus is an indication of where one's heart is, a test of one's true treasure . . . Thus, in an external sense the rich ruler may have kept much of the law, that is, he never murdered or committed adultery. But what Jesus reveals to him is that such obedience was not really rooted in love for God or love for the neighbor, for a genuine love for God necessarily involves a willingness to follow Jesus. (Schreiner, 14-5)

How is Jesus' call to follow him the ultimate substance of what it means to love God with all of one's being and one's neighbor as oneself? It is because as Jesus claims, "I have [not] come to abolish the Law or the Prophets . . . but to

fulfill them.”²⁰ A succinct explanation as to what is meant by Jesus having come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets is found in the notes of the ESV Study Bible for Matthew 5:17:

Jesus fulfills all of the OT in that it all points to him, not only in its specific predictions of a Messiah but also in its sacrificial system, which looked forward to his great sacrifice of himself, in many events in the history of Israel which foreshadowed his life as God’s true Son, in the laws which only he perfectly obeyed, and in the Wisdom Literature, which sets forth a behavioral pattern that his life exemplified . . . Jesus’ gospel of the kingdom does not replace the OT but rather fulfills it as Jesus’ life and ministry, coupled with his interpretation, complete and clarify God’s intent and meaning in the OT. (Electronic version)²¹

As has been stated, the authority of the law was not challenged by Jesus and is not negated in the twofold command to love. But what is being suggested is that true fulfillment of the command is found in knowing and heeding Jesus’ call to “radical

²⁰ Matthew 5:17

²¹ Another important passage to consider when contemplating the notion of fulfillment is Romans 10:1-4: ¹Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. ²I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. ³For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. ⁴For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

There are primarily two ways that the Greek term, *telos*, translated “end” in verse 4, has been understood: in a temporal sense, meaning the time of utilizing the law for righteousness has come to a decisive end with the person and work of Christ; or teleological, meaning the goal of the law, or the inevitable end to which it was pointing, has been reached in the person and work of Christ. Given the immediate context and the overall thrust of Paul’s teaching in Romans, the pursuit of righteousness by utilizing the law would seem to be what is being declared to have convincingly been shown to come to an end. That is, with Christ the law, as a means of attaining righteousness, has been done away with. This is not to say that the law could have ever actually accomplished the righteousness necessary to obtain eternal life, as Paul indicates in Romans 4. But as he writes as though he is addressing the Jews in this passage, he is indicating that they are to understand that with Christ all such notions must cease. Christ is the end of the law as a means by which we seek to achieve righteousness. Verse 3 would be the primary shaper of this understanding for as Paul explains, the Jews sought to establish their own righteousness through the law (the antecedent to this is found in 9:31) rather than submitting to God’s righteousness that comes by faith.

However, given the language elsewhere in the New Testament as to how the law foreshadowed the person and work of Christ (e.g., Hebrews 8; 10:1) the teleological understanding is not out of the question. Some interpreters find nuance in the word by which it can mean both. “The analogy of a race course (which many scholars think *telos* is meant to convey) is helpful: the finish line is both the ‘termination’ of the race (the race is over when it is reached) and the ‘goal’ of the race (the race is run for the sake of reaching the finish line). Likewise . . . Paul is implying that Christ is the ‘end’ of the law (he brings its era to a close) and its ‘goal’ (he is what the law anticipated and pointed toward). The English word ‘end’ perfectly captures this nuance; but if it is thought it implies too temporal a meaning, we might also use the words ‘culmination,’ ‘consummation,’ or ‘climax.’” [Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, Eerdmans (Grand Rapids: 1996) 641]. This is not an unhelpful explanation.

discipleship.” To illustrate this point we look to the account of Christ’s “transfiguration” from Mark 9:

²And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. ⁵And Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” ⁶For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him.” ⁸And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.

It seems likely that the transfiguration of Jesus before Peter, James, and John, and the visit by the figures of Elijah and Moses, were designed to exalt Jesus before the disciples’ eyes as superior to the two monumental figures from Israel’s history. As they appear to represent the Law and the Prophets that Jesus came to fulfill, and to whom the Law and the Prophets pointed, their appearance is like a living object lesson in what was transpiring with the coming of Christ. What had been anticipated had come to pass. The fulfillment motif is confirmed when the voice from out of the cloud declares, “This is my beloved Son; listen to him,” and when they subsequently looked around “*they no longer saw anyone with them but Jesus only.*” Clearly, the focus is now on Jesus. He is the one to know and heed. As such, “The supreme test of whether one loves God with one’s whole heart is the willingness to be a disciple of Jesus.”²²

We would do well to briefly consider the twofold command as presented in the Gospel of Luke through the parable of the Good Samaritan.²³ This articulation of the

²² Schreiner, 14.

²³ Luke 10:25-37

command helps illustrate how picking up our cross and following Jesus in “radical discipleship” will demand of us love that reflects our Savior’s love, a love which manifests the reality of the new era in which what had been foreshadowed has found its substance.

The parable is familiar and we do not need to rehearse all of its details. Suffice it to say that it serves as a different kind of object lesson as to how the law has been fulfilled in Christ. The restrictions to neighborly love presumed by the Jews in the code of Leviticus 19 are shattered with irony. The despised Samaritan, the kind of person to whom the Jew felt no obligation, is the one who is approved as he fulfills the command to love one’s neighbor as oneself. The priest and the Levite, likely representing ones who would be scrupulous about following purity laws, etc., are portrayed disapprovingly.

The parable seems designed to be more than just an example of generous humanity on display. It is a portrait of what it means to live in the new era when the one who fulfills the law now freely does those things that would have been prohibited by the law. Such freedom is likewise displayed when Jesus touches lepers, a woman with an issue of blood, or a dead body. He, as the fulfillment of the law, cancels all such purity laws and, as the substance of the law, shows us what it looks like to love with all of our being.

In this parable, Jesus’ teaching brings the twofold command out of the realm of theological speculation and places it in the realm in which he lived out his fully devoted love for his Father and neighbor. When the lawyer is told to go and do likewise, he is being told to love God with all of his being for the directive is being given by Jesus and

as noted before, if he were truly desirous to know how to live in a manner that pleases God, then he would pick up his cross and follow Jesus loving as God loves.

This is a form of gospel transgression. Love calls us to follow Jesus across boundaries that exist only in our self-protective codes. It beckons us to leave our temples of religious safety (or idolatrous worship) and assume the plight of the other. It is the stuff of gospel proclamation, compassionate action, and prophetic witness.

The opening verses of Philippians 2 are often cited to support the doctrine of Christ's divinity, and rightly so. But the reason Paul speaks as he does is to provoke love for neighbor, essentially saying, "If he who was God could transgress the boundary between heaven and earth as an expression of serving and saving love, should you not be willing to humble yourselves in imitation of him?" This is what is meant by gospel transgression. Following Jesus will take a disciple across boundaries, many of which have been sinfully constructed and maintained, so love of God can be proclaimed in word and deed.²⁴

As stated previously, the twofold command to love does not challenge the authority of the law. But its fulfillment in Christ does lead us to understand that our relationship to the law has at least changed. It has been widely noted that some aspects of the law have been abrogated, as they served particular functions no longer applicable in the new era initiated by Christ. While lessons and principles might be drawn from certain

²⁴ Philippians 2: ¹So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ²complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

judicial, ceremonial, or dietary laws, the binding quality of their provisions found their fulfillment in the one who was “without sin.” Their typological function is complete now that the one they typified has come.

But I sense that parsing out too vigorously which laws are still in play and which are not, might lead us to engage in debates similar to those that speculated about which laws were “weightier” than others. This could be edifying, helpful, but could also prove distracting from what is most important, namely, to place our lives in the service of the one to whom all of the Law and Prophets looked. Christians can be as guilty as Pharisees of majoring on minors, or priding themselves on their knowledge and purported piety. The twofold command to love keeps us focused on the one who is the substance of the command, and looking through that lens will encourage us to apply ourselves to God’s commands with gratitude and humility.

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