

LOVE: The One Command to Rule Them All!

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I grew up in the 60s and 70s, during the Vietnam War years, during the Jesus People movement and the hippie movement and the anti-war protests and the anti-war songs. Perhaps some of you are also familiar as I am with the lyrics of the iconic Bob Dylan song, “Blowin’ in the Wind.”

**How many roads must a man walk down before you call him a man?
How many seas must the white dove sail before she sleeps in the sand?
Yes, and how many times must the cannonballs fly before they’re forever banned?**

**The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind
The answer is blowin' in the wind**

**Yes, and how many years can a mountain exist before it is washed to the sea?
Yes, and how many years can some people exist before they’re allowed to be free?
Yes, and how many times can a man turn his head and pretend that he just doesn't see?**

**Yes, and how many times must a man look up before he can see the sky?
Yes, and how many ears must one man have before he can hear people cry?
Yes, and how many deaths will it take till he knows that too many people have died?**

**The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind
The answer is blowin' in the wind.**

We might still ask those questions: how many deaths, how many times, how much hatred, how many killings, how many years, when will it end? Bob Dylan’s only hope was “blowin’ in the wind,” but our hope, as biblical Christians, is in the absolute assurance of a future kingdom of peace and love here on this earth. It is to be established in the future after the return of Jesus, but I believe we are called, nay, commanded to represent kingdom characteristics now. Wherever our “foot shall tread” people should be able to see the light of the gospel shining forth in our words and deeds.

When I began writing this paper, I had in mind to focus on non-violence and loving our enemies. But as I continued to write, I realized my thoughts were stretching in another direction also. Yes, we are commanded to love our enemies, but we are first commanded to love one another, love the people in your own “tribe”--other Christians. If we don’t love other believers, our brothers and sisters in Christ, we cannot love those NOT in our tribe, the outsiders and our enemies.

The rise and spread of social media has created an environment never before experienced in which people can immediately communicate with others from one side of the globe to the other. We can also react to posts within seconds. And given the feeling of anonymity that exists in social media, where many of us hide behind pseudonyms, we find it far too easy to react in a knee-jerk way and to

spew whatever first springs to mind. Quite unfortunately, because of our great predilection for juicy gossip or outrageous behaviors or weird conspiracies, the algorithms of these platforms take note of what we click on in order to feed us more and more of this outrageousness. Pretty soon we are deep down the rabbit hole. We lose our orientation of up and down. We seem to lose our ability to reason clearly and to control our reactions. Before we know it, we are also posting inflammatory statements, adding to the fires.

Sadly, I have witnessed this animosity so much in Christian online groups that I unfollowed several. Yes, I saw Biblical Unitarian Christians name-calling and “yelling” – posts in capital letters—at other Biblical Unitarian Christians. This should not be!

One study I found asked the question: “Do churches and Christians love people unconditionally?” Only 41% of churchgoers and 76% of pastors surveyed replied in the affirmative. In other words, more than half of the churchgoers surveyed do not think that Christians, their own “tribe,” are loving, and a quarter of the pastors have that same negative view of their own sheep! This is shocking, disturbing data.

To those of you who have ears to listen: How will the world, the “outsiders,” know that you or I are disciples of Jesus if we are judgmentally judging, backbiting, gossiping, criticizing, ignoring, dismissing, name-calling, screaming at fellow believers? Do we appear any different from the world around us? Do we compromise and make excuses for our unChristlike behavior? Do you see nonbelievers acting more lovingly than believers? Our actions actually reflect our true heart. Jesus said that it was what comes out of our mouth, the things birthed in our heart—the thoughts and plans of murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander, and more—that defile us (MT 15:16-20). But the way that the world **will know** that we are his disciples, is by **our love**. Not by how much money we give to charities or how much Scripture knowledge we have or how large our congregation is or by whatever other measurement you wish to use. As the old song reiterates, “And they’ll know we are Christians by our love, by our love, yes, they’ll know we are Christians by our love.” Therefore, the second order after loving God above all else, is to **love one another**.

At North Kent Bible Church, we have home group book studies in the fall and the spring. We have just finished reading and discussing the book “UnChristian” by David Kinnaman. Based on hundreds of studies, data collections, and 1:1 conversations, he has learned that nonbelievers, or “outsiders” as he calls them, view Christians as hypocritical, judgmental, antihomosexual and overly involved in politics. In every chapter, the solution proposed was **love**. We Christians need to **love others more**. Instead of turning up our lip at their tattoos and piercings, their lifestyle choices, their colorful language, their “ungodly” (in quotes) behaviors, their “otherness,” we must be more welcoming, be better listeners,, be more patient, and be more compassionate.

Matthew 9:36 states that “When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were **confused and helpless**, like sheep without a shepherd.” (NLT) Other versions describe the people as *harassed, wearied and cast away, distressed and downcast, dispirited and dejected*.

It is likely that not all or maybe even not many of the nonbelievers that you regularly encounter appear to be helpless or distressed or downcast. Quite possibly they are happily enjoying their

families, their jobs, their friends, their cabin at the lake, their lives. Even so, they need us to **love** them, not negatively judge them.

For whether they know it or not, they are “enemies of God,” just as we once were. According to Romans 5:10 it was **while we were yet enemies of God** that Christ died for us.” So how do we dare judge others for doing the things we once did? And if **God** can love his enemies, how dare we do less? How dare we hold anger and bitterness in our hearts, hold on to decades-long grudges, recall the injustices that others have done to us? None of that will draw anyone closer to salvation. Remember, it is God’s love, God’s patience, tolerance and kindness that leads to repentance. (Romans 2:4).

However, in our welcoming and loving and listening and caring, by no means do we compromise or dilute the Truth. God’s expectations are true and timeless. We love, as Jesus did, while still being honest with the unsaved. Jesus extended compassion towards the woman caught in adultery, but he also delivered truth: Go, and sin no more (John 8:1-11). We do the nonbelievers no good if we show them love without also giving them truth. Patiently loving them may entice them towards salvation—as just quoted from Romans 2:4—but it is the confession of sins, the profession of Jesus as Lord, and following God’s commandments which grant entrance into the future Kingdom of God that we all look forward to. Would any of us want to be standing nearby during the Great Throne Judgment and have a nonbeliever point at us accusingly, saying, “You never told me!”

Now I will enter perhaps more controversial territory. Up to this point, I have had in mind our not-yet-saved family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, people we are in some regular contact with. Let me now widen that group. What about people we consider to be our enemies? What about the evildoers in our community? What about the people who hate us? What about the people on the other side of the political divide? What about those terrorist groups and those countries where they came from? What about those people “over there” who don’t hold our same American values? Is it okay to negatively judge them, shun them, hate them?

Let me tell you two significant events that changed and solidified my thinking on this subject. First of all, I was with a missionary team ministering in Nicaragua in July of 1986 during the still ongoing Sandinista-Contra war. As Americans, we not only represented Christ to them, we also represented America. Believers there said to us: Please tell your government to stop supporting the war here that is killing us.

The second event occurred only a few months later when I was attending the Bible College. Anthony Buzzard posed the question of whether Christians should be involved in the military and in war. When we are dropping bombs and shelling villages, how do we know whether or not any of the people below are fellow Christians? Should Christians be killing other Christians? And if they are not Christians, by killing them, we have just ended any chance they had of ever hearing the truth of the gospel of the kingdom of God and becoming a Christian. Should Christians be killing other “not-yet-Christians?”

As Bible-believing, Scripture-quoting, Jesus-following Christians we cannot pick and choose which words to obey and which ones to ignore. If Jesus is truly our “Commander-in-Chief,” we have

no other choice but to abide by every word that he spoke, even if it goes against our broken human nature or against society or against our own government. According to Matthew 28:20, shortly before his ascension into heaven, Jesus told the disciples to go out into the world to make more disciples in every nation by **teaching them to obey all the commands I have given you**. The word “all” does not leave room for any exception. We are to obey ALL his commands. So what command is there that has anything to do with this presentation?

Look up Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:43 - 46: “You have heard that the law said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ **But I tell you (!)**—(that’s my exclamation mark)—**love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you**. ... For if you love only those who love you, what reward do you get for that? Even the tax-collectors (evildoers) do that!”

These words were also recorded by Luke in chapter 6, verses 27 - 35. “But I say to **those of you who are listening** to my Gospel teaching: **Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you**. If someone hits you on one cheek, turn the other cheek. . . . Do to others what you want them to do to you. If you love [only] those who love you, why should you deserve any credit for that? Sinners do that as well. But **I tell you** to love your enemies, do good to them, and lend without expecting to be repaid anything. Then you will receive a great reward, and you will be children of the Most High God, for He is kind to ungrateful and wicked people. Be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate.”

So are you listening? Do you want to be children of the Most High God? Are you compassionate as your Father is compassionate?

Matthew 22:37-39. When asked by those trying to entrap him, what was the greatest commandment, Jesus replied: “You are to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind. This is the greatest commandment. The second is just like it. **‘You are to love your neighbor as yourself.’** All biblical law and the writings of the prophets depend on these two commandments.”

Are you upholding the first and second greatest commandments?

During the last days before his death, Jesus spoke repeatedly and emphatically about **love** as the right way of a disciple of God. John, whose letters to churches are full of talk of love, surely took to heart Jesus’ words. In chapter 13 of his gospel, he quotes Jesus: “**A new commandment I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.**” (verses 34 and 35) Notice there that he said three times to *love ... one ... another*. Love one another. Do it in the same way as I did it to you. And thus the world will recognize you as belonging to me.

How will the world, the “outsiders,” know that you or I are disciples of Jesus? By our **love**, that is IF we are actually loving one another. If we are judgmentally judging, backbiting, gossiping, criticizing, ignoring, dismissing fellow believers, will the world see “the love?” If we are sneering at the Christians who don’t believe exactly as we do, are we showing love? If we are killing Christians in other countries, will they see “the love?” If we are turning our backs on Christians fleeing desperate

situations, do they feel “the love?” **Loving one another** is not just a suggestion from Jesus, it is **an order**, an edict, a mandate, a requirement!

In John 14:24 and 25, Jesus says, “Anyone who loves me **will obey my teaching**. . . Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching.” What teachings was he referring to? Remember Matthew 28:20—“Teach them to obey EVERYTHING I have commanded you”? We don’t get to pick and choose what we like and what we don’t like about Jesus’ commands. Either he is our commander-in-chief, our **Lord**, or he is not. No amount of hemming and hawing, no amount of excuses can exempt you or me or any other professing Christian from Jesus’ order to **love one another and to love our enemies**.

Some might protest: But what if someone breaks into your home, attacks your family, is assaulting your spouse and your children, what then? Then it’s okay to hate and kill, right? I will not say that I know beforehand exactly how I would react in such a desperate situation. I will say that I will not plan ahead in my mind in what ways I will kill that person. I will do what I can to protect my family up to the point that I might have to die for what I believe and I will pray to God to give me the strength to face it. I will do all I can to avoid actually taking my enemy’s life, for that would not only be not loving him, but it would be taking from him any chance of his ever repenting and turning to God for salvation. Meanwhile, although I may lose my life, I know my future destination, I have my salvation, I will have my promised future in the kingdom of God, if I hold fast to the Truth.

Remember that it was while WE were God’s enemies, not good Christians, that Jesus died for all of us. Romans 5:6-8 again: “For at just the right time, while we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God proves His love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Jesus, then, is our Lord and the one we should always be looking to as an example of how to act. When in doubt, ask yourself, What would Jesus do? How did Jesus treat the despised persons of his society—the tax collectors, for instance? He invited himself to supper at Zachhaeus’ home and it transformed that man’s life! How did Jesus treat the prostitutes? He did not condemn them but admonished them to go and sin no more. How did Jesus treat others who were accusing him? He answered them with wisdom and truth; he did not spread lies about them on social media. How did Jesus treat those who were instrumental in his death? Did he call down legions of angels, as he had to power to do? Or did he order his disciples to attack? Or maybe he screamed obscenities at them and canceled them on X and Instagram and Facebook? Not my Jesus. While in deepest agony on the cross, my Jesus proclaimed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!”

We have seen what Matthew, Mark, Luke and John have written. What did that prolific writer and devoted disciple Paul have to say on this subject? Quite a lot, in fact.

Romans 13:10: Love does no wrong to a neighbor.

Romans 12:17 - 21: As far as it depends on us, we are to **be at peace with all people**, not just the ones we like. We are never to repay evil for evil to anyone. We are never to take our own

revenge. But if our enemy is hungry, we should feed them and give them something to drink. We are not to be overcome by evil but to overcome evil with good. We are to allow God to deal with them.

Galatians 5:14: The whole law in one phrase is **love your neighbor as yourself**. That word “neighbor” means anybody around me, including actual next-door neighbors, friends, strangers on the street, and yes, enemies. Just consider the ancient story of the Good Samaritan as told by Jesus in Luke 10:30-37. It wasn’t the religious people that helped the badly injured man; it was his “enemy.” The hated Samaritan man, the person who was supposed to hate the Jew in return, chose love instead.

Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthian church, gives a detailed description of God-type love in chapter 13. God-type love is patient, kind, does not envy, does not boast, is not proud, does not dishonor others, is not self-seeking, is not easily angered, does not keep records of wrongs, does not delight in evil, but instead it rejoices with the truth, always protects, always trusts, always perseveres, never fails. **Love wins!** Later in that letter, he urges the Corinthian Christians, “let **all** that you do be done in **love**.” (16:14)

As people who claim to be Bible-believing Christians, who claim to love God and his son and the truth of the gospel of the kingdom of God, we must strive to represent Him the best way we can. We cannot do it of our own selves, by our own human power, by just gritting our teeth. We must be **transformed**! Romans 12:1 and 2: Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. We must be different from this “present evil age” (Gal. 1:4) if we are to model the future kingdom of God on earth now. Because in that future kingdom, there will no longer be fighting, nor war, nor sadness, nor weeping, nor hatred, nor killing. We must now in this life model godly love, Christlike sacrificial love. Correction: not just model it but be filled with love, live it, **BE** it. We must **be love** if we want to make any kind of impact in this world. We have no leeway to do or be anything less than what our Lord, our Commander-in-Chief, did. He gave us our final marching orders and until he says otherwise, we have that duty to carry out.

The writer of the epistles of John, one of Jesus’ beloved inner circle, states unequivocally that if we are not loving our fellow brethren, we are liars still living in darkness. In 1 John 2, verses 3 to 9, he wrote: “We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. Whoever says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. ... Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness.” He repeats this admonishment to live and love as Jesus did throughout the rest of that letter. We ignore these words at our own peril. We can be perfect in our doctrine, but without love towards others, our truths are worthless and we are considered liars. We must love in truth and speak truth in love.

In conclusion, as John said in 2:7 of that same letter, “Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning.” We have known “from the beginning” that we are to “**love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.**” (Matt. 22:37-40) Jesus added on to this to include loving and praying for our **enemies**. As can now be clearly

seen, we are to, first and foremost, **love God**. Secondly, **love our neighbor**. And thirdly, **love our enemies**. Thus, we have the one commandment to rule them all: **LOVE**.