



Christ Reformed Community Church

161 Hampton Point Dr. Suite 2 | St. Augustine, Florida | 32092 | christreformedcc.com

October 2, 2022

Dr. Andrew Smith

“Love as Law” Mark 12:28–34

This morning, I want you to take your Bibles and turn with me to Mark chapter 12 again. This morning, we want to look at what is traditionally called “The Great Commandment,” but I’ve entitled the message “Love as Law.” Mark 12:28–34. When you find your place there, please stand in honor of the reading of God’s Word. Allow me to read our text, and then we’ll pray and look at it together. Verse 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?” Jesus answered, “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.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” 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. 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.” 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.

Please be seated as we look to God’s Word together.

Lord, before we look at Your Word, we pray that You would empower us to understand Your Word. Lord, give us strength to obey what is difficult to obey, what we can only obey in the power of the Holy Spirit. Soften our hearts, Lord, to on the one hand understand our duty to obey You, but to understand that that duty is to be wrapped up and motivated by love, love for You and love for our neighbor. We pray these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Well, those of you who have been with us over the last several weeks will remember that beginning at the end of Mark chapter 11, we’ve seen various attempts, really various waves attacking Jesus from the Jewish religious leaders. Several groups or sects, as they are called, come to Jesus seeking to trap Him into saying something they can use against Him. One of these groups is what we refer to as the Pharisees. The Pharisees were outwardly religious, outwardly moral. The other group is the Sadducees. These are the more political people of Israel. They’re not really considered spiritual, but they are considered religious. Both groups, the Pharisees and the Sadducees were devotedly religious, supremely obsessed with the Law of God. Even the Sadducees who only held to the first five books of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch, the books that Moses wrote as being

inspired by God, were considered purists by many because they did away with the oral tradition. The Pharisees held to the oral tradition, but the Sadducees rejected the oral tradition and said, “We want to focus only on the Law of God, only on the first five books of Moses.” The Pharisees, of course, had their cherished scribes, experts in interpreting and applying the Law. The Sadducees said, “We don’t really need any teachers. We just have the Word of God. It’s not that hard to understand. What God said is clear. What God said is sufficient. We just look to the Law of God.” But as different as both of these groups were, as I said, they were both fastidiously religious.

Someone once said that discipline says, “I need to.” Duty says, “I ought to.” But devotion says, “I want to.” It is possible to be a religious person and to have discipline, saying, “I need to,” and to have duty to say, “I ought to,” but only a true Christian—not a religious person—a true Christian can have discipline, duty, and devotion. A true Christian can say, “Not only I *need* to, not only I *ought* to, but that I *want* to.” In other words, true Christianity is proven by true obedience, a true desire to honor God. And true obedience, the Bible tells, is rooted in true love, which is defined as true devotion to God. Religion? Well, religion suppresses love. Christianity showcases love. Religion avoids true love. Christianity acts upon true love. And in the verses that I just read to you, Mark 12:28–34, Mark records for us the Sanhedrin’s final attempt to trap Jesus into saying something they could use against Him in order to destroy Him. These are not true Christians. These are not true believers, largely. They are rejectors of the truth, they are false teachers, they make up the Sanhedrin, and they are out to destroy our Lord.

But not only does the end of verse 34 tell us that they finally failed because it says, “*After that, no one dared to ask him any more questions,*” this passage also reveals to us the missing link of the chain of religion; and the missing link of the chain of religion is love. Love is defined by Jesus as being Law. In fact, Jesus not only summarizes for us that obedience to the Law is founded in love, but in this passage, He also provides evidence of someone truly in the kingdom of God. What will they look like? Their life will be marked by that one word: love, love. And as Mark writes this story to us, he’s a theologian. He wants to bring out the truth, and he wants to bring out the truth in a practical way, and I see coming to the surface in these verses, Mark giving to us five enduring qualities of love. Five enduring qualities of love. Let’s begin looking at them.

Number one, we learn that love is unrivaled in its source. Love is unrivaled in its source, and we see this in verses 28 and 29. Notice the beginning of verse 28: “*And one of the scribes came up.*” And he came up to Jesus because he “*heard them disputing with one another,*” that is, with the Sadducees, “*and seeing that he answered them well,*” that’s then when he decided to pose the question that he asks to Jesus. But just the beginning part of verse 28 tells us something is occurring here that has never occurred before. All of the other instances in which the religious leaders are approaching Jesus, they approach Jesus in a delegation or a committee sent by the Sanhedrin. But here, verse 28 is clear that it’s only one of the scribes that came up to Jesus. This isn’t a delegation or a committee. This is an individual scribe. Now, a scribe was someone who was an expert in interpreting and applying the Law of God. A scribe was also called a lawyer in the Bible. And the back story to the sending of only one scribe is really given to us in Matthew’s parallel account. In Matthew chapter 22, he really brings out the fullness of this. Verse 34 says, “*But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him.*” There are several things that we learn from Matthew’s parallel account. First of all, it’s the fact that the Pharisees when they heard that Jesus had silenced

the Sadducees, they came together and selected one among them, a lawyer, a scribe, to go to Jesus to test Jesus.

The fact that this one scribe or lawyer, as Matthew calls him, was sent by the Sanhedrin in order to ask Jesus a question, to test Him tells us, first of all, that he was very skilled in interpreting and applying the Law. As a matter of fact, perhaps he surpassed his own peers in interpreting and applying the Law because he is the one that is selected to confront Jesus. Secondly, we understand by Matthew’s words that he clearly came, at least originally, with the motive or with the intent to trap Jesus. So, on the one hand, he was skilled in his method, an expert lawyer. On the other hand, he was sinister in his motive, a desire to trap Jesus. However, something changed once he approached Jesus. We read in verse 28 he came up, he heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that Jesus answered well, he then asked Jesus the question. This scribe came, he heard, and he saw. I mean, he appears to be following James 1:19: “*Be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.*” He has witnessed Jesus’ ability to answer the Sadducees question about the resurrection and to answer it intelligently and to answer it biblically, arguing from Exodus 3 that the resurrection is true. And as a scribe, he is a Pharisee. He holds to the resurrection, and apparently, he is overwhelmingly impressed with Jesus, and he has a change of heart. He was sent on a mission to trap Jesus, but he has a change of heart after hearing Jesus’ answer. Now, this isn’t a change of spiritual heart. This isn’t new birth. It’s a change of attitude. No longer would his attitude in asking the question be to discredit Jesus. Oh no, this man was drawn to Jesus. He wanted to learn from Jesus. And we see that not only in the character of the questioner, but also in the character of the question itself. Notice with me the end of verse 28: “[He] asked him, ‘Which commandment is the most important of all?’”

Now, in Matthew’s parallel account, he actually calls Jesus “teacher,” but this is the first time that any religious leader calls Jesus a teacher without fake humility. This is true humility. He’s impressed with Jesus. He has true respect for Jesus, and the scribes love to refer to one another as teachers or rabbis. The word *rabbi* means “great one,” and they prided themselves in calling each other teacher and rabbi and having debates, usually public debates where they practiced the art of showing their vast knowledge of Scripture and—catch this—their ability to apply the Scriptures as a whole in a very simple way in one statement that sums up the entire Bible and sums up man’s primary duty to God. That’s exactly what this scribe is doing. He’s giving Jesus a golden opportunity to show His greatness as a teacher, as the scribe sits at His feet. Instead of testing Jesus as this man had originally planned and was originally sent to do, this scribe becomes a somewhat willing student. He asked the question, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” not to examine Jesus but to excavate truth from him. “Which commandment is the most important of all?”

Now we saw that when the Pharisees came to Jesus and asked Him with the Herodians the tax question, whether or not to pay taxes, that that was the supreme social issue of the day, the supreme political question of the day that was constantly debated. And we saw last week that when the Sadducees came to Jesus and they asked Him the question about the resurrection, that that was the supreme theological question of the day. It was the supreme theological debate of the day. But with this question, this is something categorically different because this is sort of an intramural debate among scribes and experts and lawyers. This man is so impressed by Jesus that he is giving Jesus an opportunity to sum up what the entire Scriptures say about man’s duty to God. This was

a common question for one rabbi to ask another rabbi: *“Which commandment is the most important of all?”* Now, on the scribes’ part, they had determined according to oral tradition that there were 613 commandments that God prescribed for the nation of Israel; 248 positive commandments and 365 negative commandments. Of course, you know they were obsessed with hair-splitting legalism, so they constantly debated with one another which laws were considered heavy or more important and which ones were considered light or less important. And it was their devotion to the heavier ones that they saw as more important because these heavier laws, their obedience to them would register higher numbers on the “good works scale.”

Now, Jesus was opposed to this. He had chided the religious leaders over and over again for minoring on the major laws and majoring on the minor laws, really missing the forest for the trees. As a matter of fact, in Matthew 23:23, Jesus says, *“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.”* In other words, He’s saying, “You have majored on the minors, and even in obeying the minors, you’ve neglected the major laws. You try to major on the majors and minor on the minors, and you’re completely incompetent at doing that. You’re filled with hypocrisy and legalism.”

Well, this scribe wanted to see if his obedience weighed enough in God’s eyes to get into the kingdom. That is really his motive. I think this is a sincere question. He is concerned whether or not he is holding to the weighty matters of the law. You remember that Jesus said on one occasion, the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapter 5: *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For 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.”* And then Jesus says, *“Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”* Perhaps this man had heard about this great sermon that Jesus preached and that statement: *“Whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments,”* is in danger of becoming, *“least in the kingdom of heaven.”* Perhaps there’s an element of at least superficial conviction here, but I think this man is a lot like the rich young ruler. He’s a legalist through and through. He’s concerned about his salvation, and he’s operating according to works salvation.

It was many noted rabbis, one of which, Rabbi Hillel, which I’ve quoted before and you’re probably somewhat familiar with who taught twenty-one years before our Lord’s ministry, who summed up man’s primary duty to God this way. He said, “Man’s primary duty to God is this: What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole law where the rest is the commentary thereof.” Now, many people have called this the “Silver Rule” because Jesus gave a better rule. He gave the “Golden Rule,” put in the positive: *“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”* But Rabbi Hillel and all the other scribes and even the prophets like Micah and Habakkuk would try to sum up all of the Scriptures to define in one simple statement for the people of God their primary duty to God. For example, you’re familiar with it, Micah 6:8: *“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”* A very simple summarized statement. When you strip everything away, Micah says, you are *“to do justice, love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”* And Habakkuk also has a summary statement in Habakkuk 2:4.

But we really see Jesus answering this question in verse 29 by pointing to the character of God. Notice your Bibles. It says, “*Jesus answered, ‘The most important [commandment] is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’*”” Now, this is only part of Jesus’ answer, and in fact in verse 29, He’s not even really giving the first command, but He is giving a command by implication because Jesus is quoting the Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4–5. This is recorded for us. You’re familiar with it in the Old Testament. This was Israel’s creed. It was really akin to the Lord’s Prayer for us or maybe to the Apostles’ Creed. The Shema was recited at the beginning of every synagogue service. Even to this day, it’s recited at the very beginning. The most important Scripture passage is recited. It is also the Shema that was written on little pieces of parchment and placed in little leather boxes referred to phylacteries that the scribes would dangle from their head and dangle from their wrists as they prayed to God. It was every Jewish home that had a mezuzah, which was a box on the doorpost, which contained a piece of parchment with the Shema written on it. As they walked into the home, and every morning and every evening, every faithful Jew would pray the Shema.

Well, Jesus is quoting that here in verses 29 and 30. That’s what He’s quoting, and the scribes were very familiar with this, the Shema, which is a translation of a Hebrew word, which is the Hebrew word *Shema*. In other words, Shema is a transliteration of the Hebrew word *Shema*. What does Shema mean? It simply means “hear,” and that is what verse 29 says as Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6. The most important law is this: “*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.*” In other words, of first importance to a Jew was that they were to hear, they were to acknowledge this simple fact: “*O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.*” Now, this is an assertion of what we call monotheism, that God is one. But Jesus uses the beginning part of the Shema by implication to communicate that within the character of God is the source of love itself because in verse 30 He goes on to say, “*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.*”

So, from the assertion in verse 29 that there is God and there is only one God, therefore flows the injunction that we are to love Him. In other words, we learn from this, at least by implication and that’s the first point, that He’s the only God and therefore in one sense, He’s the only one worthy of love. He’s the only one perfect. He’s the only one righteous. He’s the only one holy. He’s the only one without sin. And we are commanded to love others because God loves perfectly. He is perfectly loveable. He is the source of everything. He is our Creator. He is our Redeemer. He is our Sustainer. In fact, the very source of love is defined in Scripture as being found in God. There wouldn’t be love if God didn’t exist. First John 4:8 simply states, “*God is love.*” He is the source or the wellspring of salvation. “*For God so loved the world, that he [sent] his only begotten Son,*” or Romans 5:8: “*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for [the ungodly].*” And He’s not just given us His Son, but He’s given us all things, Romans 8:32. “*He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him,*” that is with Christ, in addition to that, “*graciously give us all things?*” Paul says in Romans chapter 8.

So, here’s the point, beloved. The point is that God is the source of love. From God comes love, and therefore, God is loveable. He is the only one true God. He is the very essence of love. God loves. God loves sacrificially. First John 4:10: “*In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*” God loves deeply, John 15:13:

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” God loves everlastingly, John 3:16. I already quoted it: “For God so loved the world, that he [sent] his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him [shall] not perish but have everlasting life.” God loves sacrificially and deeply and everlastingly. God also loves steadfastly, Psalm 145:8: “The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” And in fact, God also loves reprovably. Even in God’s discipline and chastisement there is love, Proverbs 3:12: “For the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.” God loves sacrificially and deeply and everlastingly and steadfastly and reprovably. God also loves forgivingly, Isaiah 55:7: “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and... he will abundantly pardon [him].”

And so, we learned really by implication this first statement in verse 29 of the Shema, that because God is love, because He is the source of love itself, our love for Him therefore should be unrivaled. If He is the source of love, and He has blessed us and graced us and loved us, then our love for Him should absolutely and totally be unrivaled. There should be nothing in our lives that surpasses our love for God because who is a God like this? That’s what Micah says in Micah 7:18: “Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love.” Micah says, “He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old.” This is what separates God from all the false Gods, Micah says. “Who is a God like this?” All false Gods are only constantly angry—no mercy, no compassion, no love, no forgiveness. We, therefore, are to love God. Our love for Him is to be unrivaled.

We are to love Him, for example, obediently. Turn with me to 1 John chapter 2. This is a great section of Scripture to turn to when speaking about the love of God. We’re to love Him obediently. It’s not just a feeling; it’s obedience. First John 2:5: “Whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him.” The way to know that you are in God and that He has truly set His love upon you is that you obey His Word. Or what about chapter 5 of 1 John and verse 2: “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.” For someone that truly loves God and has received God’s love, His commandments aren’t burdensome. We delight in that. We want to obey God, so the Bible says we are to love God obediently. The Bible says we’re also to love God outwardly, 1 John 4:20: “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar,” the Bible says, “for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.” We are to love obediently. We are to love outwardly. We’re also to love perseveringly. Jude 21 tells us, “Keep yourselves in the love of God.” Revelation 2:4 reminds us that the Christians at the church at Ephesus, they had forsaken or abandoned their first love. It’s a warning to us that we’re to persevere in our love for God, to make sure it doesn’t grow cold. We are to love God obediently and outwardly and perseveringly.

We’re also to love God incorruptibly. Ephesians 6:24 says, “Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.” That is, it is to be untainted, unstained with ulterior motives, unstained by idols that get in the way. We’re to love God outwardly. We’re to love God obediently.

We’re to love God perseveringly. We’re to love God incorruptibly. The Bible says we’re also to love God blindly, as hard as that is to believe. You ever heard of blind love? That’s biblical, 1 Peter 1:8: “*Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.*” There are to be no rivals to our love for God. We must have supreme love for God. So, love is unrivaled in its source, who it comes from, and those who have experienced salvation love through Christ, as we’ve just seen through a number of different passages of Scripture, will have the power to love God back, the one and only true God. The one and only true God who deserves to be loved because is lovable. And I’ll remind you, Jesus is quoting the Shema in the context of Deuteronomy. The word *Deuteronomy* means “a repeating,” and what Moses is writing to them is that “You’re getting ready to enter the Promised Land, in light of all God has done for you in delivering you and saving you and calling you and choosing you. Remember that there’s one God, and you’re to love Him with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength.” And beloved, that message is to us as well. The great motivator of our love for God is recognizing His grace for us, recognizing that He was lovable toward us. So, this passage is tremendously helpful.

Love is not only unrivaled in its source. That’s the first enduring quality we see, but we also see number two, that love is undivided in its substance. It’s unrivaled in its source, but number two, it’s undivided in its substance. And in verse 30, Jesus continues to quote the Shema, and this really gets to His point. Notice verse 30, and Jesus says, “*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.*” Now, we recite that verse, and it just sort of rolls off our tongue without really slowing down to really consider what Jesus means by quoting this Old Testament verse. Jesus is teaching again from Deuteronomy 6, and He’s basically saying this, folks. He’s saying that someone truly under the lordship of Christ, someone truly in the kingdom of God will have an undivided and substantive and total love for God. It’s been well said, “It doesn’t take much of a man to be a Christian, just faith, but it does take all there is of him.” And that is exactly what Jesus is saying here. He’s telling this scribe, “Listen, this is not about simple Pharisaical rule-following and picking out what’s weighty and what’s not weighty. This is full devotion, devotion that expresses itself in complete undivided loyalty and love for God.” It is right here that Christ defines the Law of God as love, and he defines love as Law, lifting the Law of God, lifting our love for God out of law-keeping and legalism. He says that undivided love for God involves all of the man all of the time, every part of him: his heart, his soul, his strength, his mind. So, when it says, “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,*” what exactly does that mean? Well, the word *heart* in the Bible simply means “the core” or “the essence” of someone.” This is describing deep love from the center of one’s being, a genuine love, a deep love, and so we would say this; anything that we love more, fear more, serve more, value more becomes an idol that competes with our undivided love for God. In fact, Proverbs 4:23 says, “*Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.*” We are to guard our hearts, that we are loving deeply from our very core from the right motives. So, Jesus says you are to “*love the Lord your God with all your heart.*”

Secondly, you are to love the Lord Your God “*with all your soul.*” Now, if the heart describes the essence of the man, the soul really describes his emotions or his passion. You see, love does involve feeling. It does involve passion. That’s not all that it is, but it does involve passion or emotion. Our passion for God is not to be lukewarm. It is to be white hot in our love for God. You could describe it as a holy zeal for God. And there is no greater place to look than the life of our

Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus had compassion. Jesus had feelings. Jesus not only had passionate pity, but Jesus also had passionate fury. He had passionate pity, for example, in Matthew chapter 9. He saw the crowds. He had compassion for them out of love for His Father’s glory because He wanted to see souls saved. Matthew tells us, “*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, [as] sheep without a shepherd.*” Passionate pity, a deep feeling of love. This is emotional love, but Jesus didn’t just have passionate pity in His love; He had passionate fury, right? He walked into the temple. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers because zeal for God’s house consumed Him. A holy, pure love for God’s name and God’s reputation defined Jesus. He had passionate pity and passionate fury, but He felt His love, and you ought to feel your love as well. In our culture, love has been reduced to a feeling, but don’t allow that to mis-define the Bible’s definition of love, which includes having feeling and emotion and passion. That’s what it means to love God with your soul.

Third, Jesus says that we are to love the Lord our God with our minds. Now, in Deuteronomy 6, the word *mind* is not found there. Jesus is adding this. He’s allowed to do that, by the way, because He’s God, and He is the writer of Scripture, and besides the fact the mind is certainly implied in Deuteronomy 6 because the point is not to just divide all of this up but to see that it’s the whole man. It’s the whole man. What is the mind? Well, it’s the seed of the intellect. Do you realize this morning that we are to love God with our minds; that is, with a fullness of understanding regarding who He is? There is nothing noble or spiritual on being an ignorant Christian, being ignorant of His Word, ignorant of His ways, ignorant of His character, ignorant of His exhortations and His expectations. That’s not noble. That’s actually sinful. As a matter of fact, what does Paul say in Romans chapter 12? I believe this is exactly and precisely his very point. He says in verse 1, “*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*” How can you be a living sacrifice that is acceptable to God? Paul says it begins with the mind. Verse 2: “*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*” So, there you have it. Paul says, “You are to love God with your mind.” There are no spiritualities apart from intellectualities. In fact, to be intellectual as a Christian serves is the foundation to be spiritual. God reaches the heart through the mind. And so, we are to be diligent students of Scripture. We are to know the ways of God. We are to know the Law of God. We are to be expert scribes in the sense of interpreting and applying the Law of God, and God has gifted the church with teachers to help us, but we have the Holy Spirit that indwells us, and we have a responsibility to feed ourselves with the truth of God’s Word that we might love the Lord our God not just with our hearts and with our souls but also our minds.

And then Jesus says we are to love the Lord our God with all our strength. What does it mean to love Him with all our strength? Well, I kind of like this because Jesus has just mentioned the fact that we are to love Him with our minds; and if we are to love Him with our minds, we’re also to love Him with all our might, all of our power, all of our strength. Every part of the man is to love God, all of his faculties: heart, soul, mind, and strength, from the head down to the toe, every fiber. That’s the point—his heart, soul, mind and strength—and notice how comprehensive this is. Notice how many times the word *all* is used in verse 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.*” No compartment left to yourself, total love, total devotion to God. God commands us to love, and He

lays claim to every person and every part of every person because we’ve been created in His image, and His Law has been written on our heart. That’s the standard, whether we like it or not. It’s the standard for Christian and non-Christian. And as I said, it doesn’t take much of a man to be justified, just faith alone. But it does take all of him—heart, soul, mind, and strength—to be sanctified. That’s why Paul says, “*Work out your [own] salvation with fear and trembling.*” John Owen says this, and I quote, “They that love God would have Him be all that He is, as He is and nothing else, and would be themselves like Him.” In other words, there is no other reason to love God than the fact that God is God. He is one, and He has demonstrated love. We’re to accept Him as He is, love Him as He is, and be like Him, be imitators of Him and love Him with our heart, soul, mind and strength.

But Jesus isn’t done. True love is not only upward; that is, to God, but it’s also outward to others. Love is, number one, unrivaled in its source. It comes from God, and therefore, we have the power to love. But number two, it’s undivided in its substance. It’s directed to God, but number three, the third enduring quality of love is that love is also unbridled in its scope. It’s unbridled in its scope. Notice verse 31. Jesus says, “*The second is this,*” in other words the second commandment, “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*” *There is no other commandment greater than these.*” Greater than these what? These two commandments: love of God with heart, soul, mind and strength; loving your neighbor as yourself. Jesus says, “There is no greater commandment.” “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*” Now, many people have twisted this statement and they’ve said, “Well, did Jesus contradict Himself, because in Mark 8:34, He tells us to deny ourselves and here He tells us to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.” Well, this isn’t a contradiction. May it never be. Furthermore, Jesus is not advocating the self-love of modern psychology and even commercialism of self-care by indulging oneself. The pursuit of a healthy self-image—that sort of thing is anti-biblical. I remember it was about a year ago or so, I received a mass text message from a business that apparently got my number from the Internet, and it was a message sent to me telling me basically—I don’t remember the exact words—something to the effect of, “You need to indulge yourself by purchasing our product.” I don’t even remember exactly what it is, but I remember the text said, “You deserve this. You deserve some self-care and self-time. You are important.” And so, I texted back, “Well, the only thing I deserve is hell, and the only thing you deserve is hell, and I’m depraved and you’re depraved. Stop texting me,” and they stopped texting me. [Laughter] Now, I’m not sure I was demonstrating love in that occasion, but I was expressing truth.

Listen, let’s not complicate this. When Jesus says, “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself,*” He’s not advocating self-love from the so-called foundations of self-love found in psychology, self-acceptance, accepting that you don’t have to be perfect to be worthy of love or boundaries, cultivating healthy communication and boundaries in your relationships, or self-care where the culture says, “Take the time to meet your needs as best you can. Spend your time on your hobbies and on your interests.” Or this one: “Listen to your inner voice. Change the way you talk to yourself and talk about yourself. Work on the voice in your head.” I thought only crazy people talked to themselves. Or what about self-discovery: “Learning your likes, discovering yourself, developing your goals and your hobbies and your interests, something that makes you happy.” That’s not biblical. That’s anti-biblical, that’s selfish. Jesus is not saying, “Love your neighbor as you love yourself.” This isn’t a command to love ourselves. This is not endorsing that. No, Jesus is simply acknowledging—and by the way, He’s quoting here Leviticus 19:8—He’s simply acknowledging

that humans naturally love themselves, but someone truly devoted to God who has been given a new nature should now naturally love others as they used to naturally love themselves. Man should willfully love his neighbor in the same way that he naturally loves himself. You don't have to tell your children to love themselves. It's natural, and it's part of depravity. Jesus is not endorsing depravity. This is God's Law for all of humanity—Christian or non-Christian. The difference is not that Christians can perfectly love their neighbors as themselves. No, that's not the point, but now they have the power by the Spirit to love others as themselves in a powerful way.

This is Paul's point in Romans 5:5: “*God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*” So, in other words, the reception of God's love for us through the gospel enables us to love one another. That's really what Jesus is getting at, and the rest of the Bible fleshes that out. Again, going back to the book of 1 John—you don't have to turn there, just listen—but in 1 John 4:11: “*Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*” I mean, that's basically taking a page right out of Mark chapter 12; or verses 19 and 20: “*We love,*” why? “*because he first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.*” This is an injunction to love one another. Or 1 John 4:8: “*Anyone who does not love does not know God,*” why? “*because God is love.*” The Bible says you don't even know God. That is the word in the Greek to describe intimacy between a husband and wife. In the Septuagint, in Genesis 4, “*Adam knew Eve his wife.*” It's the love of intimacy. That's how tight and how deep our love for God needs to be. We don't even know Him though if we don't have love. We're not true Christians.

Now, I should hasten to say that Jesus is not here giving a new law in verse 31 or in verse 30. He is describing God's Law from the beginning. He gave the first great commandment in verse 30: love God. He's giving the second great commandment here in verse 31: love our neighbors as ourselves. But notice how He puts it in verse 31. This is interesting. He says, “*There is no other commandment greater than these.*” Now, if you notice, that's bad English. “*There is no greater commandment,*” that's in the singular; “*than these,*” that's in the plural. What's His point? His point is that at the end of the day, folks, love is Law. You can talk about love for God, love for your neighbor; vertical love, horizontal love. But here's the point, loving God, loving others is so inextricably bound together that they're considered one commandment, but we have to think of them as two. It's a lot easier to love God than it is to love our neighbor as ourself, and neither one are easy, and so Jesus says, “*There is no other,*” that is no other commandment, besides this. This is *the* commandment to love. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:13, “*Faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*” The Bible is consistent on the fact that true obedience, truly obeying the Law is summarized in love. And the fact that this is a novel thing is just an indictment on all the scribes of Jesus' day. I mean, this is an answer that no one ever gave. No one ever thought of God's Law as being summarized in love, but Jesus was an exegete of the Old Testament. He understood that the first four commandments in Exodus 20 describe our love for God. The last six, the second table, describe love for our neighbor. Go and look them up in Exodus 20, and you'll see the first four describe love for God; the second six love for neighbor.

Jesus is simply teaching the Bible, and He's teaching the Bible in a powerful way to say this; our love should be unbridled in its scope. We should love our neighbors as ourselves. We are to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength, but part of the way we express our love for God

is found in loving our neighbors as ourselves. This means, first of all, that we are to love others divinely. You know, the Greek word that is used here in these verses for love is the Greek word *agapē*. There’s *eros* love, sensual love. There’s *phileo* love, friendship love. But *agapē* love is a word that was made up to describe the love of God, and the love that God has for us. That very word *agapē* is the word that is used to describe loving our neighbors. We’re to have a love that is like God’s. That’s how deep our love is to be. We are to be unbridled in our love. We aren’t to be stingy with it. It is to extend in a deep way, just like the love of God. Again, I’ll remind you of 1 John 4: “*Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.*” Again, God empowers us to love like Him, but He also calls us to love like Him. We are to love divinely.

Secondly, we are to love servingly. We are to love servingly. In Galatians chapter 5—you can go ahead and turn over there—Galatians 5:13, Paul says, “*For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.*” Well, that’s interesting. That’s exactly what Jesus says and what Deuteronomy 6 says. And then Paul says in verse 14, “*For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.*” That’s not the way to do it, and there’s consequences for not loving. We are to love servingly. Don’t use our freedom, as verse 13 says, as an opportunity for the flesh, or we could say an opportunity for the devil, as Paul would say in Ephesians 4. But through love, we’re to serve one another. Loving our neighbors means loving divinely, loving with God’s love, deeply. Secondly, loving servingly. Third, it means loving forgivingly. What does Peter say in 1 Peter 4? “*Above all, keep loving one another earnestly,*” and then what does he say? For “*love covers*” what? “*a multitude of sins.*” The best way for you to forgive is to love. The best way for you to love is to forgive, to forgive even without someone seeking an apology, even to forgive, at least in spirit, without requiring repentance.

We are to love our neighbors as ourselves, divinely, servingly, forgivingly. We’re also to love indiscriminately. Turn with me to James chapter 2. We are to love indiscriminately. Remember the heading for this is unbridled in our love, because our love should be unbridled in our scope, the way we view things, the way we view others. And in James chapter 2, James gives us a scenario here and leaves me wondering if this actually happened among these churches. Verse 1:

My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet.

James says, “*Have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*” This isn’t loving. “*Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?*” There’s the word love again. “*But you have dishonored the poor man.*” In other words, you have not loved him. “*Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?*

If you really,” watch it, *“fulfill the royal law,”* James calls it. This is the supreme law, the law above everything. What will you do? There’s a royal law according to the Scripture: *“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”* James says, *“You are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become,”* accountable to all. You see, you can obey outwardly, not love inwardly and outwardly, and you’re guilty of breaking all the law of God.

You say, “Who is my neighbor?” Well, here’s the short answer; anyone created in the image of God. God loved His creation. He sees man as the best part of His creation, and although sin has distorted the image of God within man, there’s still a recognizable enough image of God imprinted on him. As Reformed people, we do not believe that the image of God has been destroyed. That is not the Reformed view. So, we are to love everyone, indiscriminately, unbridled in our scope of love. How do I know this? Well, back in James 3:7–10, James speaks about—and you don’t have to turn there, I’ll just read this for you—but in James 3, he speaks about using our mouths in a hateful and unloving way. And he says in this passage that somehow the people of God are using their mouths to bless the Lord and Father, but then with it they’re also cursing people who are made in the likeness of God, and James says you shouldn’t curse people and talk ugly about people who have been made in God’s image. Not only that, but we know Jesus is speaking about loving our neighbors as ourselves, neighbors being anyone created in the image of God, which is everyone because of Leviticus 19:18.

Now, I mentioned Leviticus 19 to you, but back in Leviticus chapter 19 in which Jesus is quoting, we have some insight here. Leviticus 19:18, the Bible says, *“You 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.”* What Moses is speaking about here is loving your fellow Israelite as yourself, but you say, “Well, does it stop with just the fellow Israelite?” or to fast forward into modern times, “Does it just stop with Christians loving other Christians? I mean, are we really obligated to love the world and the heathen?” Well, I think so because the Bible seems to be clear about it. Verse 33 of Leviticus 19 says, *“When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong.”* This is an alien, a foreigner. Don’t do him wrong. *“You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you.”* In other words, no partiality. You treat him indiscriminately, just as if he’s a fellow Israelite. *“You shall love him as yourself.”* There it is again. *“For you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.”* “You remember what it was like to be an alien and a stranger. You remember what it was like to be in a place you weren’t familiar with. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” as Jesus would later say. In fact, Jesus included neighbors as the Samaritans, remember that, the story of the good Samaritan? And in Matthew 5, I don’t even need to go back and read it, verse 43 and 48, Jesus says we are to love our enemies. So, even our enemies, those are created in the image of God. That’s what it means to love our neighbor as ourselves. Our neighbors include our enemies. Here’s how it works. Love from God triggers love for God which releases love of God to others. That’s the way that it works. It’s a packaged deal, so there’s no other commandment that is greater than these. What does Jesus say in Matthew’s parallel version? *“On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”* You want to know the summary of man’s primary duty to God? It’s found in loving God and loving neighbor.

Now, that takes us to the fourth enduring quality of love. Love is not only unrivaled in its source. Love comes from God; therefore, we are to love God. And love is undivided in its substance. It’s directed to God, all of man, every part of every man. It’s unbridled in its scope. It’s indiscriminate, doesn’t show partiality. But number four, it is unmatched in its service. It is unmatched in its service. Back in Mark 12:32–33, notice: “*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. 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,’*” says the scribe, “*than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.*” Now, I find this response by the scribe very interesting because this is the only time in the record of the gospels that I’ve ever found where Jesus is not only impressed, as we’re going to later see by the answer the scribe gives, but where the scribe actually adds biblical truth to Jesus’ already established teaching. Jesus doesn’t disagree with what he says. In fact, he commends him later.

This man is arguing from Scripture. It shows that he is sincere. He’s not trying to debate Jesus like the others. He’s really trying to understand, and notice he responds. Jesus has three points to His sermon. He adds a fourth point. He says in verses 32 and 33 that everything Jesus taught was right from the Shema. He knows He’s quoting it, that there is only one God, there’s none besides Him. He knows, as verse 33 says, that we’re to love God with all our heart, all of our understanding, all of our strength. He knows that we’re to love our neighbor as ourselves, but then he adds this “*is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.*” This man truly was an expert. He responds with a panoply of passages, repeated and reflected and applied. Deuteronomy 4:35 is quoted in verse 32: “*The Lord is God; there is no other besides Him,*” and also Isaiah 45:21. Deuteronomy 6:4 is quoted in verse 32: “*He is one,*” the Lord is one. Leviticus 19:18 is quoted in verse 33, the same verse that Jesus quotes, but he’s also quoting 1 Samuel 15:22 and Hosea 6:6. I mean, this guy sounds like an expository preacher. He’s just rattling the verses off. They are just rolling off of his tongue. You’re familiar with 1 Samuel 15:22, which is similar to Hosea 6:6, which says these are the words of God: “*For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.*” This man knows his Bible, and basically, he’s saying that love of God and love of neighbor is far more valuable than burnt offerings and sacrifices.

You see, the reason he’s saying that is because he’s beginning to see that everything the Pharisees emphasize, everything that they pointed to in their hollow religion—outward obedience, this ritual, this ceremony, this sacrifice—and even the Sadducees, it was all for nothing. It meant nothing. They weren’t really being obedient to God. Better to love God and not to do those things than to do those things and not love God. That’s what the Bible says. 1 Samuel 15:22, Hosea 6:6 from the words of God’s own mouth: “*[I] desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,*” God says. “I mean, I want the sacrifices too, but I’d rather have love,” God says. These whole burnt offerings and sacrifices commanded by God mean nothing apart from love. The burnt offerings were entirely consumed by fire, just as our lives are to be consumed by obedience, an obedient life, and this man understands that. Love for God, love of neighbor—that’s the supreme duty. That’s the standard. There is no other. When you sum it all up, true obedience is not found in lazy rituals but in living relationships with God and with others. True obedience is not just a consuming fire at the altar. It’s a consuming burning fire within, within our hearts, souls, minds, and strengths, that show we’re in covenant with God and that we love God, and, therefore, we’re able to love others. The burnt offerings represent what was entirely consumed at the altar. The sacrifices represent the small portion consumed, the rest of which was eaten by the priests. And this scribe says, quoting 1

Samuel 15:22, Hosea 6:6 none of the sacrifices, none of them, the burnt ones or all the rest, none of them matter as much as love. He’s saying—and mark it—with scriptural support, that our service to God and others and a life of obedient love is far more important than religious ritual.

So, I ask you this morning, is your life marked with love or hollow religion? Is it marked with a list of things you do and don’t do that feed your self-righteousness, or is it marked by love? Are you just a religious person and not a loving person because religious people are not loving people? They don’t know anything about love, grace, mercy, and compassion, and the religious leaders love themselves and their religion. They didn’t love God. They didn’t love others. In fact, I can prove it to you if we just sneak ahead. Verse 38: *“And in his teaching he said, ‘Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.’”* And then what happens right after that? You flip your page in the Bible and you have the widow’s offering. This woman is a victim of the Old Testament health-wealth prosperity gospel. She’s a victim because verse 40 says the religious people *“devour widows’ houses.”* That’s not love. You see, folks, we’re to love people and use things—not love things and use people, and religious people use people. They don’t love. It’s so clear, isn’t it? I mean, the Bible is so clear about love. If it’s clear about anything, it’s clear about love. First John, the apostle of love, over and over and over again. *“And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.”* Over and over and over again, the Bible tells us.

So, five enduring qualities of love. This is powerful. Number one, love is unrivaled in its source. Love comes from God and is to be directed to God. Number two, love is undivided in its substance. It’s love directed to God from every fiber of man. Three, love is unbridled in its scope. We are to love others, everyone indiscriminately, our neighbor as ourselves. Fourth, it’s unmatched in its service. Hollow religion is not to replace love. And number five, we also see that love—and this may shock you—is unworthy in its security.

I want you to note with me verse 34 because when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, in other words, intelligently, biblically, rightly, but Jesus said to him although He was impressed, He says, *“You are not far from the kingdom of God.”* You know what that means? It means you’re outside of the kingdom of God. You may understand the standard; you’ve not fulfilled that standard. In fact, this is the fifth enduring quality of love, and it’s really an observation. If the scribe can add a fourth point to Jesus’ three-point sermon, then I’m going to add a fifth point to it by observing this in verse 34, and that is that love in and of itself is unworthy in its security. In other words, love by itself is unworthy in securing you eternal life. *“All we need is love.”* That is the mantra of many, and then they redefine what love is. Though the scribe answered wisely, Jesus, I am convinced, had love within His heart toward this man, and He said, *“You are not far from the kingdom.”* In other words, you have a head knowledge, but you have no heart knowledge. What did Jesus say in Matthew 5:47 right after saying that we are to love our enemies, which seems impossible, right? You shall love your neighbor. Hate your enemy? Jesus says, *“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. And if you greet only your brothers,”* what good are you doing? *“Do not even the Gentiles do the same?”* I mean, if all you do is love those who are like you, everyone does that. Jesus then says, *“You therefore [are to] be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* Wow! I thought salvation was not according to works. It is for you, but it wasn’t for Jesus. He

perfectly obeyed the Father—the only one in the history of the world who perfectly loved God, the Father, and perfectly loved His neighbors as Himself and gave His life a ransom for many.

So, we read at the end of verse 34, “*And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.*” In other words, they’re completely silenced. The Sanhedrin completely shut up. They have lost, but Jesus says, “*You are not far from the kingdom,*” indicating that the scribe was also losing. The scribe was lost. The Sanhedrin couldn’t trap Jesus, but this man was still trapped in his sin. Jesus says, “*You are not far from the kingdom,*” to basically say this, “You are not in the kingdom. You are trying to earn your way to heaven. You understand that love summarizes everything, but no matter how much you love, it will never be enough. You need someone to love for you. You need someone who has loved you.” “*You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*” Jesus is the only one to be perfect as His Father in heaven, to love God, to love neighbor, sent into this world to live an obediently perfect life in fulfilling the Law of God in total supreme love, loving God with all His heart, with all His soul, with all His mind and all His strength, and then dying on a cross loving His neighbor as Himself. That’s true love, and it’s that love alone that can cover a multitude of sins. You can’t get into heaven or into the kingdom by loving your way in. That’s just legalism. That’s just morality.

Everyone has a semblance of love, but God grades according to the cross, not on a curve. You don’t have more love than Christ. And so, Jesus is telling this man, “*You are not far from the kingdom.*” This man was religious, but he was still lost because, listen folks, to be almost saved is to be totally lost, and that’s where this man was, still trying to think he could earn his way to heaven because he finally got to the bottom of what summed up God’s Law, “And if I can just love like this.” Jesus says, “*You are not far from the kingdom,*” which is to say, “You’re not in the kingdom. You’re outside of the kingdom.”

You are all familiar with John Wesley, and those of us who are Reformed are in love with his brother, Charles, I guess I should say. John Wesley had a lot of problems. I do believe, though, that John Wesley was a true Christian. He grew up in a very strong home. He was a child of Samuel and Susanna Wesley. He was talented and dedicated. He became a double professor in Greek and logic at Oxford. He returned to Oxford as he was, I guess, in his early mid-twenties, and he joined a group of undergraduates that were led actually by his brother, Charles Wesley, and also part of that group was the later to be great evangelist George Whitfield. This group was dedicated to one thing—building a holy life. In fact, their fellow Oxford students referred to their little group as “the holy club,” derisively in titling it that, making fun of them. What did these men do? They were yet converted, but they thought they were converted. They were trying to work their way to heaven, praying, studying the Greek New Testament, all sorts of devotional exercises, taking the sacrament weekly, the Lord’s Supper, fasting twice a week, visiting prisons, assisting the poor and the sick, doing all they could.

In 1735, John Wesley was sent to Savannah, Georgia, to minister as a missionary to the Indians. It was a great fiasco. You know why? Because he was unconverted, a missionary unconverted, trying to work his way to heaven. The Indians hated him; he hated them. And when he returned to England, this is what he wrote. John Wesley said, “I went to America to convert the Indians, but oh, who shall convert me?” And on a boat, he ran into some true Christians who encouraged him to read the Bible and to re-examine the gospel. On the morning of May 24, 1738, something

happened that he never forgot. He opened his Bible haphazardly and his eyes fell on Mark 12:34, and the statement *“You are not far from the kingdom of God.”* That led to his conversion. That led to his true salvation. *“You are not far from the kingdom of God.”* He took that to mean, “I’m not in the kingdom of God. I need the grace of Christ.” Oh, how John Wesley is like this scribe. Both clergymen, both highly educated, both Bible scholars, both knew the Scriptures, and Christ said to both of them, *“You are not far from the kingdom of God,”* which is to say, “You are not in the kingdom of God.”

I truly hope this morning that we all examine our hearts. You know, the Bible says we are to examine ourselves. To try to work your way into heaven, to try to be holy, to be puffed up with self-righteousness and good works, thinking somehow at the end of time, your good works will outweigh your bad works and you’ll be led into the kingdom. That is the type of person that stands condemned in their sins. The reality is all of us are not far from the kingdom, which means none of us are in it apart from His grace, apart from His grace offered through the Lord Jesus Christ. So, how does your life match up? Well, you obviously should have a life marked by love. That is what sums up the Law of God, but don’t think that you could love your way into the kingdom. The only way that you can love as Christ loved is to understand that He loves you and gave His life for you. Repent of your sins; give your life to Christ. He’ll give you the Holy Spirit. The love of God will be shed abroad in your heart, and loving others won’t be as difficult as you might think it would be because you have the power and the very life of God within you because you’re in the kingdom and you know how to love. And God loves you, and you know God, and people know that you are of God. May that be true of all of us. Let us pray.

Father, we thank You for Your Word. A diligent study of Your Word and the subject of love leads us to conviction because all of us recognize we aren’t who we ought to be. But, Father, we know what we should be. We know the standards of Scripture. We can’t outdo Christ in His love for us, so we receive it by grace. And yet as we receive that love, understanding His great love and dying for sinners to bring us eternal life, we understand that we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We’ve been empowered to love back. We pray that You would help us to do just that. Lord, we pray in a moment after we close our prayer, as brother John plays this beautiful hymn and as we reflect upon it by reading the words, Lord, that You would use it to prepare our hearts for the Lord’s Table. We know that Your Word has prepared us to partake of this feast. We pray that the words of this hymn would also encourage our hearts. Help us to reflect upon what we are doing. We are partaking in the love feast. We are reminding ourselves of Your great love for us through Christ. May we do it purely. May we do it with devotion. May we do it with sincere love. We pray and ask all of these things in the blessed name of Christ, our Savior.