

Love is the most discussed, written on, and talked about topic in human history. It is the most agreed upon and the most contentious. It's one in which everyone has some understanding of, and no one argues with love being a net positive. Over a hundred million songs have been written on this very topic. Love saturates pop culture. It permeates our minds. It's something we absorb in the world around us, but even beyond pop culture, it permeates our philosophy, our worldview, and the zeitgeist of the day. We live in a unique time, though, in which this idea of love maybe is positive, but we have differing understandings of what love is, of what love is to be.

This same debate that we see in the first century has continued to rage throughout the centuries—what is love? What is our net positive? Is it the center of our ethical reasoning? Is it the center of our morality of how we understand how to live in this life? But what is unique to our time, maybe for the first time in human history, is that all the debates about morality and love and ethics are raging in a culture and a society in which we don't have a shared consensus of what love or morality is.

These debates have raged for centuries, but all of them have taken place within a culture where there is a consensus understanding of right and wrong or what is good and bad. It's happened in Confucius Societies. It's happened in Hindu culture, Muslim culture, Communist culture, Catholic culture, and Protestant culture, all of them within a framework where there's a shared sense of what is good; what is love. We live in a time where our social institutions don't necessarily provide that same sacred canopy, as one author called it. This shared sense of right and wrong; it's different. It's contested. We live in a space in which moral dialogue becomes challenged. It becomes harder to understand what exactly we mean by love. As the cultural saying goes, love is love. Or is it? Here's where it's ironic. We actually have a sense of common ground with culture regarding love. I would imagine if we were to go out on the street and poll ten people and ask if we should love our neighbors, all ten of them would say, "Yes, we should love our neighbors." This is actually a space in which we have a lot of common ground with the culture around us. However, what is meant by the term love? It certainly seems the way Jesus answers this particular question that's posed to him is saying the very thing that our culture would say, that love is at the center, the heartbeat of what it means to be human and how we should live in this world.

But did you catch that line at the end of our text? I want to start with the end first because it's one of those taken-for-granted statements. This is one of those texts that you and I have probably heard or are somewhat familiar with, but notice the exchange. For all of the commonality of love at the center of what it means to be human, notice that very last

line in verse 34. *"And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions" (Mark 12:34b).*

Now that's an interesting response for one that we would assume has a general consensus. It would seem that the fallout after this teaching is people were a bit fearful of Jesus. They were a little apprehensive about what he had said. What Jesus communicated in this short, familiar teaching actually caused people to retract. So there must be something in Jesus' depiction here, his teaching in these short few lines, that if we read carefully, we can see that there's something else going on beneath the surface. Because often people responded to Jesus when he preached, particularly the familiar text, that you and I do not. Whether that's familiarity or whether we've taken for granted certain understandings about what we think Jesus said. Maybe there's more to what Jesus said here. Maybe this commandment to love is more radical than we've ever imagined. Maybe there's something deeper beneath the surface.

These are the questions I want to look at this morning because the text, the teaching of Jesus, our rabbi, places love right at the center of everything. What is the greatest commandment? Jesus says to love God and love others. So what is it that caused people not to dare ask another question?

We'll look in a few places in the Bible because Jesus is in a few places. Let's start in Mark 12:28. Now remember, this is an ongoing scene going back all the way to chapter 11. Jesus has been confronted by the religious leaders over and over again, and there have been these really contentious moments in which Jesus uses sharper language than he uses in most other places in the scriptures. So it's in the middle of this tension in which, the text says, this teacher of the law heard them debating, it says, *"One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, 'Of all the commandments, which is the most important?'" (v. 28).*

It says "this teacher of the law," or your Bible might say a scribe. What exactly is a teacher of the law or a scribe? It's important to understand their role because that will help us understand why this particular question. A teacher of the law or a scribe in our modern understanding is like a theologian and a lawyer mashed into one.

In the modern world, we've divided those two things, so it's hard for us to imagine. But a scribe or a teacher of the law, their whole intent was to study the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, understand and pull out all of the commands and the laws of those scriptures and contextualize them and what they meant for the people of God to live by.

In the Old Testament, there are 613 laws. There are 248 positive laws, meaning "do this," and 365 negative laws meaning "don't do this." So you add those together, and you have 613 total laws. On top of that,

what grew up, not out of scripture but out of the oral tradition of the rabbis, was called the Mishnah, which added another 1500 laws with their intent of helping them obey the 613! So all of a sudden, the question the man asks is out of all the over 2000 laws, what's the one thing I should do? What's the greatest thing I should do? Two thousand laws are crushing.

This was a very common first-century debate that had been raging. One would go to a teacher or rabbi and ask them of all the commandments, what's the one thing? And think about it, Jesus had just been teaching about the resurrection, about the new creation. They're saying, "Okay, we get all of that, but Jesus, what is all of this about?" It's easy to lose the forest for the trees. It's easy to forget what is the center among 1500 laws and the 613 in the scriptures. What is the core of our morality? What is the good life?

That's this question, which is seemingly, at first glance, obscure, but I would argue it's the question that you and I asked quite a bit. What is all of this about? What is the purpose of being here? What does it mean to follow Jesus in our day? This is a very pertinent question, so Jesus takes that context, and let's listen to his answer.

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' Mark 12:29-30

If you're familiar with this in your scriptures, there are two quotations. There's the quotation of Jesus' response, but then within that, there's another quotation. That's because Jesus is quoting from Deuteronomy 6, which was known to Israel as the Great Shema. The word Shema is the first word of that quotation that Jesus gave. It's the word for hear: "Hear O Israel, Shema, O Israel."

Now a little bit of work on that word. We tend to think of "hear" as sound waves hitting your ear. But for the Hebrews, it was much, much more than that. It wasn't just listen to the sound waves vibrating in your eardrum; it was more listen and do. This is you, parents when you look at your kid and say, "Listen to me." You're assuming they hear you, but they're not hearing you. Shema, Israel. Listen.

Listen and obey are two concepts that are very much interconnected. Jesus is quoting The Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4-5. "*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*" Jesus is quoting this directly because this was a prayer, maybe better understood as a creed that a good Israelite like Jesus would probably recite multiple times a day, at least morning and evening. They'd write it on scraps of paper; they'd hang it on their doors. They'd talk about it with their children as they were walking along the road. This was, for them, the very center, the creed in which they organized their life. Jesus is quoting this. He's saying, "If you want to know what all of this boils down to, Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one."

Now this idea of the Lord God being one was pretty radical. Remember, the Shema was written thousands of years before Jesus and was in a

polytheistic world. So the concept of monotheism, of God being one, was radically new. That was one of the distinctives of the Israelites amongst the other cultures was they were a people who worshiped the one true God, the one living God. So it says, "Hear O, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one."

As it moves from this discussion of both declaration of what's true about God, notice the ethical implications of God being one. We're saying everything that flows from how we are to live, to hear and to do, is rooted in the identity of God as one. There's a shared consensus of what is right and wrong, and that stems from the good, the true, the beautiful that stems from God. God is the arbiter of that. And so, in this creed of how do we now live as the people of God, the Lord our God, the Lord is one, is there's a sense in which the coherent dialogue around morality and what life is about, what is good, what is wrong, all of that is cohering to this idea that Yahweh is one. He is the one true God.

How do they then love? What are they supposed to do? Well, The Shema has three answers; Jesus gives four. The first thing it says is that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart. We tend to impose so much into the text when we hear a word like heart. The Hebrew word for heart is the word *lebhab*, and we tend to impose on it our feelings and our emotions. That's not necessarily wrong. That's tied up in there. There's a sense in which we should bring our emotions. Those are good, healthy things the Lord has given us, and those should be directed toward God. But that's not the biblical understanding of heart.

The biblical understanding of *lebhab* or the heart could be understood as the inner person and include the will, the heart, the mind, and everything that constitutes the internal self that is to be aimed at God.

One way that helps us understand this is to think of your consciousness. Your consciousness should be pointed toward God. It's this place from which your entire life springs. Your inner being is to be aimed at God. All that makes up the internal self is moved in the direction of God. Love the Lord your God with all your internalness, with all your heart. Then it says, love the Lord your God with your soul. Now soul is another word we get a little mixed up. In Hebrew, it is the word *nephesh*.

We impose this idea that this is the immaterial part of us. We get the idea that the soul is this nebulous floating being from Plato, not from the scriptures. That is a very platonic, ancient Greek philosophy. That's not the biblical imagination of the soul. The soul is actually the whole collection of who you are, both immaterial and material. Your body, in the biblical imagination, is a part of your soul. Don't think of it as the part that floats away someday or something like that. That's totally different, foreign to the biblical imagination. That's not what the soul is. The soul is the wholeness of who you are, the real you. This is a myth that we tend to buy.

We think in the modern world that the real us is trapped inside our bodies, and our bodies then are just vehicles that we carry around our souls in. No, you are made by God—Genesis 1 said, from the dust of the ground—that's the material that formed and created Adam and then breathed the Spirit of God into Adam. You are body and spirit. This is your soul, the connection of all of who you are, which means

downstream from this that the Christian story actually has a higher view of the body than the world around us.

Because if the body is inspired and breathed into by the very presence of God, part of what it means to be created in the image of God is that we actually have a very deep, distinctive purpose for the body and the soul. Both of those things together constitute you. Your body is not your soul's slave, not the internal slave in which your real self is trapped. This would mean that we can do whatever we want with it, dispose of it because its soul serves some other purpose. But rather, if we are to love God with our soul, the body, and the immaterial part of us, we bring the wholeness of who we are.

So to love God with all your soul is to bring your life force, energy, your everything that God's placed in you. It's the human engine in life. We are to bring that to God. You're to love God with your body, strength, internal being, intellect, passion, and calling; all of those things are aimed toward God. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

The word strength in Hebrew is the word *meod*, which is actually an adverb, which makes it a little trickier. You can't say strengthy; that doesn't quite make sense to us! But it really means your muchness, your veryness. It's a word that's supposed to bring an emphasis, an emphatic tone to it. You love God with your muchness, not like how much you can curl and bench press. That's not the strength that's going on here. It's to love God with what you do. It's the latent potential that you hold within you that is to be used towards God—your vocation, passions, life calling, all of it is to love God. Your muchness is brought to God—education, experience, giftings, talents, relationships, work; you are to point those in the direction of the Lord, the one God.

This is brilliant the way God understands this because, in the church world, this undercurrent of the real Christians were the ones who did the preaching and stuff. Or there's another lie that only the upper echelon was those who went into the mission field. Those are great high callings. I really believe this is what I have been called to do, to dedicate my life to studying scripture and preaching to you. But that's no higher elevation than those of you who are called to teach kindergarten, to plumb, to be an electrician, or to code and design. All of those things you are to bring your ode, your muchness to, because the reality is God is bringing the reconciliation of all things together. And if we're all preachers, then we're missing a lot of areas. All industries that cultivate order from chaos are actually dignified works of the gospel. It's what you are called to do. It's to love God with your muchness.

So Jesus says, "Love the Lord your God with your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength." Then if you go back to Mark, you'll remember that Jesus added a fourth one, which was certainly something that would not have been missed by the teachers of the law. When all of a sudden, they heard the word "mind" in the middle of this, they would've said that Jesus is riffing a little bit off of Deuteronomy 6. He's extrapolating, which, when you're Jesus, you can do that. You can add to scripture in some sense because it's his thing, right? It's what he does. So he adds this fourth category, the mind.

Now we're in the New Testament. The word isn't in Hebrew anymore; it's in Greek. It's the word *dianoia*. We tend to think of it in a flat way, like your thoughts, and that's part of it. But think of it as more. I heard one author call it "your directed attention." That's a pretty good way to think of the mind because it is more than just the thoughts that come to your head; rather, they're the thing to which you give your attention. We're actually going to unpack this concept a lot in the fall as we launch our second practice in our rule of life called Renewing the Mind, which we take from Romans 12. Paul says, renew your minds.

What's interesting about the mind is it is the place of your greatest freedom. No one can get in and block your mind. You have control over your mind. You have control over the thoughts that you think, the things you meditate on, and the imagination you allow to fill your mind. With that, you actually have quite a bit of freedom to your directed attentiveness. You can have intrusive thoughts and things that break in (where'd that come from?). Certainly, that takes place, and those are in there, and it's a nuanced conversation. But the reality is you still have much control over your mind.

Jesus says to love the Lord your God with all your mind. To love the Lord your God with all your mind means that you have to work on how you saturate your mind and imagination with the things of God. Do you fill it with the true, the good, and the beautiful? Do you fill it with thoughts of God, with scripture that you memorize and bury within you so that in those moments when your mind is drifting, scripture begins to percolate and bubble up? You have control over some of these things. Paul would say, renew your mind. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. It's no wonder that the devil works off lies and deceptions, lies that get into your head, distortions, and untrue things which control you. This is why Paul would say to take every thought captive. The mind is a powerful aspect of who you are.

Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your mind. This isn't some parsing together the human into four categories. There's obviously the tenor in which Jesus is saying, love God with every corner of your being, every aspect of you, every part that constitutes you, bring that and aim that before God. You are an integrated being. You are not just a mind here and a soul there and a body there. Everything—all of this heart, soul, mind, strength—all of it is what constitutes you. Jesus says that the greatest commandment is this. Bring all of that in an integrated way before the Lord.

Remember, the question was, of all the commandments, which is the most important? The most important one Jesus answered is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. But Jesus isn't done yet. *The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:31).* Jesus is interesting because he says the one important commandment, and then he says the second one. The man didn't ask for two, but yet for whatever reason, this second commandment is so tied to the first that Jesus couldn't even differentiate them and leave them in two categories, but rather, the number one command is to love God with everything you are and

somehow that overflows into the love of neighbor. For Jesus, you cannot differentiate between the love of God and the love of neighbor. Those two things are always two sides of the same coin. They intermingle, they interflow, and they intermix together. The output of loving God is the love of neighbor, and in your love of neighbor, you are actually loving God. The two go together.

Now what's interesting is Jesus is quoting from Leviticus 19. In there is a section in which Moses is giving the law that was given from God through Moses to the people, and it's in a section in which there're all sorts of these commandments about how we are to love and interact with others. The part that Jesus quotes is, in many respects, a summary statement of that which came before it. [Leviticus 19:13-19](#).

The idea of love of neighbors, yes, is about your literal neighbor. We'll get to that in a second, but in context, it's about much more than that. It's about the way in which Israel is to interact with everyone around them. It has to do with justice. It has to do with people who hold a grudge against you. It has to do with the people in your community, even the one you hate. You know what I mean? It has to do with economic justice. It has to do with all of these things because, for Jesus, this idea of love of God and love of neighbor cannot be separated.

There are three things that we need to think through on this because the question you should be asking is the question that the teacher of the law in Luke's account follows up with—who is my neighbor? And when we read this Leviticus text, we get a little more color on who the neighbor is. At a very basic level, it means your literal neighbor, like the one you share a property line with, the one in your apartment complex you share walls with. It means your literal neighbor. We like to spiritualize this and move past this because we like the idea of loving the other over there, and it's disembodied. It's not really a name or a face; it's just the concept of love for someone over there. I love my neighbor. Everyone loves their neighbor, but do you love your neighbor? You know what I mean?

A good question would be, do you know your neighbor's name? Do you know their story? Have you had them over for dinner? Do you love your neighbor? Jesus' commandment here means much more than that, but it doesn't mean less than that. It doesn't mean less than the one you quite literally live by. When we begin to put a neighbor's face and name and a story onto it, this begins to get a little edge because, if we're honest, we often don't get to pick our neighbors. That means that it can put you in good circumstances or tough circumstances. It can be challenging to love your neighbor. It can be easy to love your neighbor. Do you love your literal neighbor?

Second, it can mean your figurative neighbor. This is the one that we tend to be a little more comfortable with. In context, Leviticus 19 speaks to that. This is the one who's on the other end of the socioeconomic spectrum. Maybe they're on the other end of the political spectrum or the class spectrum. Generally, as humans, we like to love those who are like us. It's easy to love those who look like us and dress like us and vote like us and spend like us and listen to the same music as us and eat

the same food as us. We, by nature, are creatures that move in those directions, but Leviticus 19 seems to be saying that love is about the figurative neighbor, the one across the spectrum.

This is why it's so important that you gather in this room week after week because if you look around, we are a community across all sorts of differences. And the beauty in that is that's actually one of the tools God uses to have us learn how to love our neighbor is when we love each other in this room. This is what is so tragic when the church begins to divide into political factions, or I go to this church now because they're leaning more this way, or they spend this way, or they believe that, and we fracture things in such a way that we've lost what Dallas Willard would call "The school of love."

He says the church is one of the places where we gather across differences but under the higher calling of Jesus as the Lord our God, the Lord one, who unifies us. Those other things are important, but they're secondary. So when we organize around the utmost importance that we come under the authority of Jesus, that we confess him dead, crucified, and resurrected as our Lord, when that becomes the rallying cry, all those other differences actually serve to form us. They serve to shape us more into a person who can love the person who's different from us because we in here learn how to do that and not break fellowship.

I talk to a lot of people who feel like they need to leave the Bay Area because they are different; they don't fit in. They want to move to a place where everything makes sense, and it's easier. And that may be; I'm not going to arbitrate what the spirit's doing. There are generally beautiful reasons to do that. But I do wonder, could it be that God has you in a place where you are contrasting with culture because that might be the most transformative thing for you? Could it be that you live on your street with your neighbor in your culture where you might disagree and all of those things, not in spite of your faith, but because of it? Because Jesus wants to use that to chip away at the hard edges of your heart that have some prejudice against some. Who looks at others and thinks, "I don't really want to deal with them?" Could it be that you're here at this time, in this place, for Jesus to shape your heart for your neighbor? What if you flipped that understanding that you were to love your neighbor as yourself, your literal neighbor, your figurative neighbor? Then the one in Luke where the teacher of the law asks, "Who's my neighbor?" Remember what Jesus did in Luke 10? He answers that by telling the story of the Good Samaritan.

The third category is we also love our enemy because Jesus tells this story of the Good Samaritan. The Jews and the Samaritans were bitter rivals and enemies. The idea of a good Samaritan was a contradiction in terms. You don't tell stories about good Samaritans in the Jewish world. But Jesus says, "This is your neighbor." And the story he tells is about a priest and a Levite who walk by a guy who is almost dead on the road because they don't want to deal with him. They would get unclean if they dealt with someone who was bleeding out. Then a Samaritan comes along who is the hero of the story—the enemy—helps the dying man.

The command to love your neighbor is also to love the one you despise, the one you hate, the one who you couldn't imagine loving, and the one who you are so distant from is the one which God says you are to love. Jesus goes so far as to say there is no greater commandment than this. These are the two things. What is the greatest of all? Well, it's to love God with everything you are. It flows from that, and you love your neighbor.

This is what's so radical about this. This is why people chose not to ask any more questions because if God becomes that preeminent, orienting thing in which we understand how we live, the Lord God, the Lord, is one, that organizes how we understand love, and from that flows the love of neighbor. Were we not once enemies of God? Jesus, in fact, loved his enemies. He went to the cross, laid his life down for his enemies, and those enemies are you and me. This is not something that Jesus is just plucking out of thin air. He's saying, "I will embody this and show you the way," and we then are to embody it and show that to the world around us. You love your enemy because God first loved you. You love your neighbor because God first loved you. It begins in that organized way. In the way of Jesus, the love of God and the love of neighbor are inseparable. You cannot divide these things. The man responds in Mark 12 because he catches this whiff of the Kingdom of God. Mark is showing us that this guy is starting to get it.

All the other questions and confrontations we've seen over the last two chapters they haven't really understood, but this guy begins to. Listen to the way he responds.

"Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." vv. 32-33

This is the guy who is to understand the Old Testament law and help organize how to bring burnt offerings and sacrifices properly. Jesus is standing in the temple when this is taking place. He's within the temple courts, and the teacher of the law says, "You're right. Love of God and love of neighbor is more important than any sacrifice or offering you bring." For all of the religious piety and the religious acts we do, we bring those before God. But if they do not result in the love of God and love of neighbor, Paul would say, you're a resounding gong. It's pointless.

Here's the *telos*—the goal, the aim of all that we do to follow Jesus is about more and more becoming a person of love. Love, not defined by the culture around us, but love defined by the Lord our God, the Lord one. And this love is the agape type of love, the love that God has for you and me. All of our religious doings, all of the spiritual practice that I'm very high on, that I talk about, all those things are secondary. If they are not cultivating in you a heart for the love of God and love of neighbor, then they're worthless. They are a means to an end. The goal of something like Sabbath is not just to Sabbath; it's to ultimately become a person of love. It's to allow God to shape your internal being, your heart,

soul, mind, strength, and love for your neighbor, so that becomes the operating orienting principle of your life.

That is what all of this is aimed at, and this teacher of the law is starting to get it. He says, "You're right. It's better than all the sacrifices, all the offerings. It is the most important thing." But notice Jesus' response in verse 34. "*When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, 'You are not far from the kingdom of God.' And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.*"

Interesting response! "You are not far from the kingdom of God." He doesn't say you're in the kingdom of God. He says that you're not far from it. And then, in a very Markian/Jesus-fashion, the story ends. You don't hear what happens next. We know nothing of this teacher of the law later. We don't figure out later whether he does these things or not. But it harkens back to Shema. Jesus says, "You've heard me, but have you heard me?" He says, "The teaching has vibrated in your ear, but have you obeyed them?" Because it's one thing for us to intellectually ascend to this idea of love of God and love of neighbor again. The case here is no one's going to argue with me that that's what we should do. Jesus says the greatest commandment is to love God and love others.

So it isn't so much that we listen to the words "You are not far from the kingdom of God." See, what Mark is doing is he's not just writing a story about a first-century teacher of the law. He is writing a story about you and me. He's inviting us into the text to say, "You might not be far from the kingdom of God." My guess is every single one of us believes this is the right thing to love God and love others. The question before us isn't is Jesus' teaching right. The question before us is, will we live by it? Will we obey it? Will we aim our heart, our soul, our mind, and our strength toward the things of God? Will we get to know our neighbor's name? Will we get to know someone in here who we don't know and love them? Will we love that person we despise when I said enemy that came to mind?

All of this really depends on what we understand about this word love, but don't miss this. This is the main point of what Jesus is bringing for us today. Love is the mark of maturity. Love is the mark of spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity can be hard to track. It's difficult to understand. Is it about how much I read my Bible? Is it about the knowledge I have or how many times I pray? Jesus would say the greatest commandment of all is to love. Love is the mark of maturity.

I've spent many years and thousands of dollars to learn about the scriptures, all of it meaningless if I do not grow as a person of love. My hope is not that I figure it out perfectly, but my hope is that year over year, Lindsay and my two daughters, and my close friends could attest that maybe Kevin took a little bit more of a step towards love. I don't know if I figured that out. I can guarantee you I've got all sorts of ways and areas of my heart that I need to grow in love, both for neighbor and for God, but I hope year over year, the deep desire of my heart, is that I become more and more a person of love. But again, love as defined by the Lord our God, the Lord one.

We have a different context of this idea of love than the culture around us. For the culture around us, we've shifted in our understanding of love to where love has now been defined by what you think or feel. It's moved from an external category like the Lord our God, the Lord is one. That's an external understanding of what love is, and it's moved internally. What we tend to mean by love is that I have strong feelings and emotions for something. This is why you can say you love your wife and you love tacos. But you don't love tacos. You have strong emotions for tacos, but you don't love them. You want to consume them.

But watch the move here. We do this with love. Tacos are a funny, benign thing, but we do this with others. You have strong feelings for your job. You want to consume your job for what it can give you. You have strong feelings for that woman or man you just met, but maybe deep down, it's not love as defined by God. It's you who wants to consume them for your own pleasure. You want to love and expand those emotions outward.

See, love has become a self-centric thing where the arbiter of what is love and what isn't love is the self. But the radical thing about the love that God defines is it's this love, this Greek word *agape*, which is the love that God has for us. It's entirely other-centric. Scot McKnight, in his book *The Jesus Creed*, defines love:

For Jesus, love of God and love of others is the core. Love, a term almost indefinable, is unconditional regard for a person that prompts and shapes behavior in order to help that person to become what God desires. Love, when working properly, is both emotion and will, affection and action." Scot McKnight, *The Jesus Creed*

Look at that line again. "It's unconditional regard for a person that prompts and shapes behavior in order to help that person become what God desires." Love is the active willingness of the other above your own for the purpose of them coming to know God. That is the aim. Dallas Willard, in another book, would say, "Love is not desire—it is to will the good of others." Love, as Jesus commands, as Jesus exemplified, is not defined by the self. It's not self-centric, in which it works out from the way you feel. It's quite the opposite. It's where God placed you around others, and therefore your love is to intentionally will the good of those around you, all of it designed through this lens of Here O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. That is the definition of love. And Jesus says that the greatest commandment is for every corner of your being to be organized about elevating the other above yourself. I wouldn't dare ask him another question, either!

I picked up from a pastor I was listening to this week that there are two sins that you constantly see pop up with Israel. Over and over, they wrestle with these two sins. Those two sins are idolatry and injustice. What is idolatry? It's a failure to love God. What is injustice? It's a failure

to love your neighbor. These two twin sins are what the prophets are constantly calling out in the people of God, and they're saying over and over, "You've given yourself to idols. You've failed to love your neighbor." This story is as old as time. It's the same thing we wrestle with.

Church, what is it that you love—and God? It's idolatry. What is it you love and say, "God, I love you. I'll give you this part of me. I'll give you my Tuesdays and Thursdays. I'll give you my morning routine. I'll give you this part of me on Sundays, but I'm not going to give you this or that. That's idolatry. Where is it that you live unjustly, where you fail to love your neighbor? Justice is about loving your neighbor. Where is the aspect in which we fail to love God and love our neighbor? These are the two things in which Jesus says,

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 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: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." Mark 12:29-31

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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